

THE
KNIGHTS OF THE CROSS

An Historical Romance

BY

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THE following indications will serve as a guide to the pronunciation of the proper names which occur in the volume :—

c	has the sound of	ts	in	“fits.”
cz	„	ch	„	“church.”
sz	„	sh	„	“ship.”
szcz	„	sh-ch	„	“Ashchurch.”
j	„	y	„	“young.”
w	„	v	„	“vow.”
ch	„	ch	„	“loch.”
rz	„	j	„	“bijou.”
g	„	g	„	“got.”

Anulka	pron. A-nool'-ka	Macko	pron. Mats'-ko.
Bogdaniec	Bog-da'-ne-ets.	Mikolaj	Me-ko-lie.
Ciechanow	Tse-ech'-an-ov.	Powala	Po-va-la.
Danusia	Da-noo'-se-a.	Spychow	Speech'-ov.
Dobrzyn	Dob'-jeen.	Szczytno	^{Sh} Cheet'-no.
Hlawa	La'-va.	Taczew	Tach'-ev.
Jadwiga	Yad'-ve-ga.	Wladyslaw	^V La'-dees-lav.
Jagienka	Ya-ghee-en'-ka.	Wyszoniek	Ve-shon'-e-ek.
Janusz	Ya'-noosh.	Zawisza	Za-ve'-sha.
Jurand	Yoo'-rand.	Zbyszko	^Z Beesh'-ko.
Krakow	Kra'-kov.	Zgorzelice	^Z Go-jel-eets'-ay.
Krzesnia	Kjes'-ne-a.	Zych	Zeech.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE CROSS

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

IN the common room of the abbey inn at Tynieć, called the "Dreadful Urus," a small group of men sat listening to the tales of adventure told by a soldier who had fought in distant wars. The soldier was a middle-aged man, huge and robust, although his bearded face was gaunt with the privations of an arduous career. He wore his hair bound within a beaded net; his jerkin of leather, which showed the marks made by the cuirass, was girt about by a belt formed of massive buckles of brass, in which was thrust a knife with a scabbard of horn, and from which hung a short sword. Near him sat a comrade, who was, apparently, an esquire, since he too wore a like jerkin of leather. He was a youth of bright, open countenance, with long curls hanging down over his shoulders. The rest of the company was composed of two noblemen from the neighbourhood of Krakow, and three burghers from Tynieć, wearing their long red caps, the tops of which fell to their elbows. The host, a German, served the company with ale, which he poured from a bucket into earthen jugs.

At this epoch, the hatred which had divided the City from the Knighthood in the time of King (Lokietek) was less virulent, and the burghers were more independent, than in the centuries which followed. They were given titles of respect, for their liberality was greatly appreciated. It was, therefore, no unusual thing to see noblemen and merchants drinking together fraternally in the inns. The burghers, indeed, were welcome companions to the

knights, inasmuch as their full purses were ever ready to discharge the score.

Thus townsmen and nobles sat conversing together amicably, each making a sign to the host from time to time to replenish his drinking-jug.

"Noble knight," said one of the merchants, "you have indeed seen much of the world!"

"Not many of those who are even now coming to Krakow from all parts have seen so much," answered the knight.

"There will be enough of them, too," said the merchant, "seeing that the festivals in honour of the King are about to be held. The King has given orders for the Queen's chamber to be upholstered with golden brocade embroidered with pearls, and for a canopy of the same texture to be placed over her. There will be such entertainments and tournaments as the world has never seen before."

"Uncle Gamroth," said the second merchant, "do not interrupt the knight."

"I am not interrupting, friend Eyertreter; only I think that he will be glad to know the things of which every one is talking, for he, I am sure, is going to Krakow. As for us, we cannot return to the city to-day, because they will have shut the gates."

"So you speak twenty words in reply to one. You are growing old, Uncle Gamroth!"

Further dispute was stopped by the knight.

"Yes," said he, "I purpose staying in Krakow, for I have heard of the tournaments, and I should be glad to try my strength in the lists. And this youth, my nephew, who, young and smooth-faced as he is, has already brought many a cuirass to the ground, will enter the lists also."

The guests glanced at the youth, who laughed gaily, and, pushing back his long hair, raised the jug of ale to his lips.

"And even if we wished to return," the older knight added, "we have no place whither to go."

"How is that?" asked one of the nobles. "Whence come you, and what is your name?"

"I am (Macko of Bogdaniec), and this lad, the son of my brother, is called (Zbyszko). Our device is 'Tempa Podkowa,' and our war-cry is 'Grady!'"

"Where is Bogdaniec?"

"Pshaw! Better ask, lord brother, where it was, since

it is no more. During the war Bogdaniec was burned, and we were robbed of everything. Our servants fled from the place. Only the bare soil remained, for the farmers of the neighbourhood hid themselves in the forests. This youth's father rebuilt his dwelling, but in the following year a flood swept it away. Then my brother died, and after his death I remained with the orphan. But the life there was not endurable. I heard of the war for which Jasko of Olesnica—whom King Wladyslaw sent to Wilno, as he had sent (Mikolaj of Moskorzowo)—was raising soldiers. I knew a worthy abbot, Jankó of Tulcza, to whom I gave my land as security for the money I needed to buy armour and horses. This boy, then twelve years old, I set on horseback, and we went together to Jasko of Olesnica."

"That stripling!"

"He was only a child then, but he was always a hardy boy. At twelve, he could rest the crossbow on the ground, press it against his chest and turn the crank as well as any Englishman I ever saw in Wilno."

"Was he so strong?"

"He used to carry my helm, and when he had passed his thirteenth winter he could carry my spear also."

"You had plenty of fighting there?"

"Because of Witold. The Prince was with the Knights of the Cross, and every year they used to make an expedition against Lithuania as far as Wilno. All manner of troops went with them—Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen—they are the best bowmen—Bohemians, Swiss, and Burgundians. They cut down the forests, burned the castles they found on their way, and finally devastated Lithuania with fire and sword, so ravaging it that the people of the country longed to leave it in search of another land, even at the ends of the earth, even among the sons of Belial—only far from the Germans."

"We indeed heard here that the Lithuanians desired to flee with their wives and children, but we did not believe it."

"But I beheld it. Had it not been for Mikolaj of Moskorzowo and Jasko of Olesnica—and, without any boasting, if it had not been for us—there would be no Wilno now."

"We know. You did not surrender the castle."

"We did not. And now, listen to what I am going to say, for I have had experience in military affairs. The

old people used to call them 'the wild Lithuanians'—and they say truly! They fight well, but in the field they cannot withstand the knights. Of course, it is otherwise when the horses of the Germans get sunk in the marshes, or when the fight is in a thick forest."

"Oh, the Germans are good soldiers!" exclaimed a burgher.

"They are like a wall in their iron armour. They advance in one compact body. They strike, and the Lithuanians are scattered like sand. There are others besides Germans with them, for men of all nations serve with the Knights of the Cross. Ah, they are brave! Often, before the battle-line advances, a knight will bend forward in the saddle, stretch forth his lance, and rush single-handed against a whole army."

"Heaven, what bravery!" cried Gamroth. "And who among them are the best soldiers?"

"It depends. With the crossbow, the best is the Englishman. He can pierce a suit of armour through and through; at a hundred paces he will not miss a dove. The Bohemians make fearful havoc with their axes. With the great two-handed sword, the German is the best. The Swiss delights to thresh the helms with his iron flail; but the greatest knights are those who come from France. They fight on horseback or on foot, and as they fight they shout brave words, although one cannot understand their strange tongue. They are a pious people, too. But they are bitter against us. They say we are defending the heathen and the Turks against the Cross, and they would prove that we are in the wrong by a knightly tourney. So God's judgment is to be shown by a combat between four French knights and four of ours, who are to meet at the Court of Wacław, the King of Rome and Bohemia."

"And who are the knights from our side?" exclaimed several of the listeners eagerly. "Tell us quickly."

Macko raised the jug to his lips, drank, and then answered:

"Oh, have no fear for them. There is Jan of Włoszczowa, castellan of Dobryń; there is Mikolaj of Waszmuntow; there are Jasko of Zdakow and Jaros of Czechow—all renowned knights and sturdy fellows. It will be worth while for men's eyes to see this combat; ay, and for their ears to hear it, for, as I said, a Frenchman,

even with a foeman's foot at his throat, will still speak knightly words. Therefore, so help me God and the Holy Cross, they will out-talk us! But our knights will defeat them in the lists."

"That will be to our great glory, if God so bless us," said one of the nobles.

"And Saint Stanislaw!" added another. Then, turning towards Macko, he exclaimed: "Well, tell us more. You praised the Germans and the other knights because they are valiant and because they have conquered the Lithuanians easily. Did not they have harder work with you? Did they overcome you so readily? How did it all happen? Cannot you praise our knights?"

But evidently Macko of Bogdaniec was not a braggart, for he answered modestly:

"Those warriors who returned from foreign service attacked us readily enough at first; but, after they tried our mettle once, they renewed the contest with less assurance. Our enemies were wont to say of us: 'You despise death!' But they added: 'You help the Saracens, and you will be damned for it!' And because this taunt was not true, our enmity grew ever more deadly. The King and the Queen have Christianised Lithuania, as every one knows. But it is known also that our gracious lord, when they threw down the devil in the Cathedral of Plock, ordered them to put a candle before him, and the priests were obliged to tell him that this was not fitting. Small wonder, then, at the doings of lesser men! Many of them say to themselves: 'The Prince ordered us to be baptized, therefore we were baptized; he ordered us to bow before the Christ, and we bowed; but why should we grudge a little piece of cheese to the old heathen devils, or why should we not cast them some turnips; why should we not pour the foam off the ale for them? If we do not do so, then our horses will die, or our cows will be sick, or their milk will be turned into blood, or there will be some trouble with the harvest.'

"And many of them do these things, and they are looked upon with suspicion in consequence. Yet they only do so because of their ignorance and their fear of the devils. In times of yore the devils had their own groves, and they went on horseback, taking their tithes. But to-day, the groves are cut down and the devils get nothing to eat. In the cities the church bells ring, and the devils

are driven to hide in the thickest forests, where they howl unceasingly from sheer loneliness. If a Lithuanian goes into the forest, they lay hold on him by his sheepskin and cry 'Give!' Sometimes a Lithuanian does give, but there are courageous fellows who will not bestow anything, and these are persecuted by the devils. One man put some beans in an ox bladder, and immediately three hundred devils entered into it. Then he stopped the bladder with a service-tree peg, brought it to Wilno, and sold it to the Franciscan friars, who gave him twenty marks for it. He did this that he might thus destroy the enemies of Christ's name. I have seen that bladder with my own eyes; a dreadful stench came from it, for it is thus that the vile spirits manifested their dread of the holy water."

"And who counted them, that you should know there were three hundred devils?" asked Gamroth the merchant, with some show of astuteness.

"The Lithuanian counted them when he saw them entering the bladder. It was evident that they were there; one could know it by the stench—and nobody cared to take out the peg for the sake of counting them."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" exclaimed one of the noblemen.

"I have seen many wonders, for everything among them is peculiar. They are very shaggy, and few even of the princes comb their hair. They live on baked turnips, which they prefer to any other food, because they say that bravery comes of eating them. They live in the forests with the cattle and the snakes; they are not abstinent in eating or drinking. They despise the married women, but respect the maidens, to whom they attribute great power. They say that if a maid rubs a man with dried leaves it will stop colic."

"It were worth while to have colic, if the women are beautiful," exclaimed Uncle Eyertreter.

"Ask Zbyszko about that," answered Macko of Bogdaniec.

Zbyszko laughed so heartily that the bench shook beneath him.

"They are indeed beautiful," he said. "Ryngalla was charming."

"Who is Ryngalla? Come, tell us."

"What! Have not you heard of Ryngalla?" asked

(Macko) "She was Witold's sister, and the wife of Henryk, Prince of Mazovia."

"You do not say so! Which Prince Henryk? There was only one Prince of Mazovia, the Bishop of Plock, but he is dead."

"The same. He expected a dispensation from Rome, but death gave him his dispensation instead. Evidently he had not pleased God by his action. Jasko of Olesnica sent me with a letter to Prince Witold at the time when Prince Henryk, Bishop of Plock, was sent by the King to Ryterswerder. Witold had then become tired of the war because he could not capture Wilno, while our King was tired of his own brothers and their dissoluteness. The King, having observed that Witold was shrewder and more intelligent than his own brothers, sent the Bishop to him to persuade him to leave the Knights of the Cross and return to his allegiance. For this, he promised to make him ruler over Lithuania. Witold, always ready to change, listened with pleasure to the embassy. There were also a feast and tournaments. The Bishop mounted a horse, although the other bishops did not approve of it, and showed his knightly strength in the lists.

"At the outset, the Prince threw three knights from their saddles; the second time, he threw five. He threw me from my saddle; and at the beginning of the encounter Zbyszko's horse reared, and he was thrown. The Prince received all the prizes from the hands of the beautiful Ryngalla. They fell so much in love with each other that, during the feasts, the priests pulled him from her by his sleeve, while her brother, Witold, restrained her. 'I will give myself a dispensation,' said the Prince, 'and the Pope—if not the one in Rome, then the one in Avignon—shall confirm it; but I must marry immediately—otherwise, I shall burn!' It was a great offence against God, but Witold did not dare oppose him, for he did not wish to displease the Ambassador, and so there was a wedding. Then they went to Suraz, and afterwards to Sluck, to the great sorrow of this youth, Zbyszko, who, according to the German custom, had selected the Princess Ryngalla to be the lady of his heart, and had promised her eternal fidelity."

"Pshaw!" suddenly interrupted Zbyszko, "it is true. But afterwards the people said that Ryngalla regretted being the wife of the Bishop, because he, although married,

did not wish to renounce his spiritual dignity ; so, feeling that God's blessing could not be over such a marriage, she poisoned her husband. When I heard that, I begged a pious hermit, who lives not far from Lublin, to absolve me from my vow."

"He was a hermit," answered Macko, laughing, "but was he pious? I do not know. We went to him on Friday, and he was splitting bears' bones with an axe, and sucking the marrow so hard that there was music in his throat."

"But he said that the marrow was not meat; and, besides, he had received permission to do as he did, for, after sucking marrow, he used to have the most marvellous visions during his sleep, and next day he could prophesy until noontide."

"Well, well!" answered Macko. "The beautiful Ryngalla is now a widow, and may call you to her service."

"It would be in vain, for I am about to choose another lady, whom I will serve until death, and, after choosing her, I shall find a wife."

"You must first obtain the belt of a knight."

"A trifle! There will be plenty of tournaments. I can measure myself against any. The Prince could not have thrown me down had not my horse reared."

"For heaven's sake!" the noblemen began to shout. "They will not fight such as you in the presence of the Queen, but only the most famous knights in the world. Here you will see Zawisza of Garbow and Farurej, Dobko of Olesnica, Powala of Taczew, Paszko Zlodziej of Biskupice, Jasko Naszan, Abdank of Gora, Andrew of Brochocice, Christian of Ostrow, and James of Kobylin. Can you measure your sword against the swords of these, with which neither the knights here, nor those of the Bohemian Court, nor those of the Hungarian Court, can compete? Of what are you thinking? Are you better than they? How old are you?"

"Eighteen," answered Zbyszko.

"Any one of them could crush you between his fingers."

"We shall see."

"I have heard," said Macko, "that the King munificently rewarded those knights who returned from the Lithuanian war. Speak—you are of this place—is it true?"

"Yes, it is true," answered one of the nobles. "The King's munificence is known to all the world; but it will be difficult to approach him now, for the guests are swarm-

ing to Krakow ; they are coming in order to be in time for the Queen's confinement and for the christening. The King of Hungary is coming ; they say the Roman Emperor will be here also, and many princes, counts, and knights will also come, for not one of them expects to return with empty hands. They even say that Pope Boniface himself will be present, for he also needs favour and help from our lord against his adversary in Avignon. Therefore, in such a throng it will be difficult to get near the King ; but, if one should succeed in seeing him and bowing at his feet, then he will liberally reward him who deserves it."

"Then I will bow before him," said Macko, "because I have served well ; and, if there should be another war, I will do so again. We have taken some booty, and are not poor ; but I am getting old, and when one is old, and the strength has left one's bones, one is glad to have a quiet corner."

"The King was glad to see those who returned from Lithuania with Jasko of Olesnica, and they feast well now."

"Ah ! I did not return at that time—I was still at the wars. You know that the Germans have suffered because of the reconciliation between the King and Prince Witold. The Prince got back the hostages by cunning and then rushed against the Germans. He razed and burned the castle, and slaughtered the knights and many of the people. The Germans wanted revenge, as did also Swidrygello, who went against them. Then another great expedition was sent forth. The (Grand Master Konrad) himself went with a large army ; they besieged Wilno, and tried from their towers to destroy the castles. They also attempted to capture the city by treachery, but they did not succeed. While retreating, there were so many killed that not half of them returned. Then we attacked (Ulrich von Jungingen) the Grand Master's brother, who is bailiff in Swabia. But the bailiff was afraid of the Prince, and ran away. On account of his flight, there is now peace, and they are rebuilding the city. One pious monk, who could walk over hot iron with his bare feet, has since then prophesied that, so long as the world exists, no German soldier will be seen under the walls of Wilno. And if this be so, then by whose hands has it been accomplished?"

Having said this, Macko of Bogdaniec extended his

broad, enormous palms, while the others nodded in approval.

"Yes, yes," they said. "What he says is true."

Further conversation was interrupted by a noise which came through the windows, from which, as the night was warm and clear, the bladders had been removed. The sound of thrumming, singing, and laughing, and the snorting of horses was heard in the distance. This was surprising, as the hour was late. The host hurried out into the courtyard, but before the guests had time to swallow the last draughts of their ale, he returned crying:

"A princely train is coming!"

A moment afterwards a footman, wearing a blue jacket and a red folding cap, appeared in the doorway. He stopped, glanced at the guests, and then, observing the host, said:

"Clear the tables and prepare the lights. The Princess Anna Danuta will stop here to-night."

Having said this, he withdrew. A great commotion now arose in the inn; the host called to the servants, while the guests looked at one another in great surprise.

"The Princess Anna Danuta!" said one of the townsmen. "She is Kiejstut's daughter, the wife of Janusz of Mazovia. She was in Krakow for two weeks; she then went to Zator to visit Prince Waclaw, and now she is returning."

"Uncle Gamroth," said the other townsman, "let us go to the barn and sleep on the hay; this company is too high for us."

"I do not wonder that they travel during the night," said Macko, "for the days are very sultry. But why do they come to the inn, when the monastery is so near?"

Here he turned towards Zbyszko and said:

"The beautiful Ryngalla's own sister—do you understand?"

"Hah!" answered Zbyszko, "then there must be many Mazovian ladies with her."

CHAPTER II.

At that moment the Princess entered. She was a middle-aged lady, with a smiling face, and wore a red mantle and a light green dress, with a golden girdle about her waist. The Princess was followed by the ladies of the Court. Some of these were still in early girlhood, while others were older; they wore pink and lilac wreaths about their heads, and most of them carried lutes and flowers. The room was soon filled, for the ladies were followed by a goodly number of courtiers and pages. All were gay, with smiling faces, and they talked loudly or hummed lively airs, as if intoxicated with the beauty of the night. Among the courtiers there were two rybalts,* one of whom had a lute and the other a gensla† at his girdle. Behind the Princess a young girl, who might have been twelve years old, carried a very small lute, ornamented with brass nails.

"Let Jesus Christ be praised!" said the Princess, standing in the centre of the room.

"For ever and ever, amen!" answered those present, making a profound obeisance.

"Where is the host?"

The German advanced to the front and kneeled, in the fashion of his country, on one knee.

"We have come here to stop and rest," said the lady. "Only make haste, for we are hungry."

The townsmen had already gone. The two noblemen, and, with them, Macko of Bogdaniec and young Zbyszko, now bowed again, intending to leave the room, as they did not wish to intrude upon the Court. The Princess, however, detained them.

"You are noblemen," she said; "you do not intrude,

* Minstrels.

† A musical instrument.

for you are accustomed to courts. Whence has God conducted you?"

They announced their names, their surnames, their device, and the estates from which they derived their titles. The lady, having heard from Wlodyka* Macko that he had been to Wilno, clapped her hands.

"How well it has happened!" she said. "Tell me about Wilno, and about my brother and sister. Is Prince Witold coming for the Queen's lying-in and the christening?"

"He would fain do so, but does not know whether he will be able to come; he has therefore sent a silver cradle as a present to the Queen. My nephew and I have brought it."

"Then the cradle is here? I would gladly see it. Is it all of silver?"

"All of silver; but it is not here. The Basilians took it to Krakow."

"And what are you doing in Tyniec?"

"We returned here to see the procurator of the monastery, who is our relative, in order to deposit with the monks that with which the war has blessed us."

"Then God gave you good fortune and precious booty? But tell me why my brother is uncertain whether he will come!"

"Because he is preparing an expedition against the Tartars."

"I know it. I am grieved that the Queen did not prophesy a happy result for that expedition, as everything she predicts is fulfilled."

"Ah!" said Macko, with a smile, "our lady is a prophetess, that I cannot deny; but the best of our knight-hood will go with Prince Witold—splendid men, against whom none can contend."

"Are not you going also?"

"No, I was sent with the cradle, although for five years I have not taken off my armour," answered Macko, showing the furrows made by the cuirass on his reindeer jerkin. "Permit me but to rest, then I will go; or, if I do not go myself, then I will send this youth, my nephew Zbyszko, to Pan† Spytko of Mielsztyn, under whose command all our knights will go."

* A land-owner, sometimes a noble.

† Lord.

Princess Danuta glanced at Zbyszko's handsome figure, but further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a monk from the monastery, who, having greeted the Princess, began humbly to reproach her because she had not sent a courier with the news of her coming, and because she had not stopped at the monastery rather than at an ordinary inn, which was not worthy of her Highness. There were, he declared, plenty of houses and buildings in the monastery where any wayfarer could find hospitality, and royalty was ever most welcome, especially the wife of the great Prince from whose ancestors and relatives the abbey had received so many benefits.

"We came here only to rest our limbs," the Princess answered, smiling; "by morning we must reach Krakow. We sleep during the day, and travel during the night because it is cooler. As the cocks were crowing, I did not wish to arouse the pious monks, especially with such a company, which thinks more about singing and dancing than of repose."

And when the monk persisted, she added:

"No, we will stay here. We shall spend our time well in singing lay songs, but we will go to the church for matins, so as to begin the day with God."

"There will be a mass for the welfare of the gracious Prince and the gracious Princess," said the monk.

"The Prince, my husband, will not come for four or five days."

"The Lord God can bestow blessing even from afar; and, in the meantime, let us poor monks at least bring some wine from the monastery."

"We shall gladly repay you," said the Princess.

"Ho! Danusia! Danusia!" she called when the monk had gone, "mount that bench and make our hearts merry with the same song you sang in Zator."

At these words, the courtiers set a bench in the centre of the room. The rybals sat at each end, and between them stood the young girl who had carried behind the Princess the lute ornamented with brass nails. She had a small garland on her head, and her hair fell about her shoulders. She wore a blue dress, and long-pointed red shoes. Standing on the bench, she looked a child, but a beautiful, an angelic child. It was evident that it was not the first time she had sung before the Princess, for she was not in the least embarrassed.

"Sing, Danusia, sing!" cried the other damsels.

She took the lute, and raised her head like a bird preparing to sing; then, closing her eyes, she began in a silvery voice:

My heart is heavy for lack of thee,
Of thee, my love! O my love!
To thee I'd fly over land and sea,
Were I but a bird, my love!

The rybalts accompanied her, one on the gensla, the other on the large lute. The Princess, who loved lay songs better than anything else in the world, began swinging her head backwards and forwards to the rhythm, while the young girl sang on in a thin, sweet, childish voice, like that of a bird warbling in the forest:

I'd sit and sing in a leafy tree,
Near thee, my love! O my love!
I'd sing and ask thee to look on me,
On me, O my love! My love!

And then the rybalts played. Young Zbyszko of Bogdaniec, having been accustomed to war and its dreadful sights from his childhood, had never in his life heard anything like it. He touched a Mazovian, who stood beside him.

"Who is she?" he asked.

"She is a damsel of the Princess's Court. We have no lack of rybalts to cheer us, but she is the sweetest little rybalt of them all, and the Princess listens more gladly to her songs than to those of any other."

"I do not wonder. I thought she was an angel from heaven; and I cannot look at her enough. What is her name?"

"Have you not heard? Danusia. Her father is Jurand of Spychow, a count mighty and gallant."

"Ah! Such a girl human eyes have never seen before!"

"Every one loves her for her singing and her beauty."

"And who is her knight?"

"Ah! She is still only a child."

Further conversation was stopped by Danusia's singing. Zbyszko looked at her fair hair, her uplifted head, her half-closed eyes, at her whole figure, illumined by the wax candles and by the radiance of the moonbeams that entered through the windows; and he wondered more and

more. It now seemed to him that he had seen her image before, but he could not remember whether it had been in a dream, or on the pane of some church window in Krakow. Again he touched the courtier and asked in a low voice:

"Then she is of your Court?"

"Her mother came from Lithuania with Princess Anna Danuta, who married her to Count Jurand of Spychow. She was pretty, and belonged to a powerful family. The Princess liked her better than any of the other maidens, and she loved the Princess. For this reason the Countess called her daughter Anna Danuta after the Princess. But five years ago, when near Zlоторja, the Germans attacked the Court, and she died of fear. Then the Princess took the girl, and has taken care of her ever since. Her father often comes to the Court; he is glad that the Princess should bring his child up in health and happiness. But every time he looks at her, he remembers his wife and weeps; then he returns to avenge on the Germans his cruel wrong. He loved his wife more dearly than any one in the whole Mazovian province ever loved before, and, in revenge, he has killed a host of Germans."

In a moment Zbyszko's eyes sparkled, and the veins on his forehead swelled.

"Then the Germans killed her mother?" he asked.

"Yes, and no. She died, as I have said, of fear. Five years ago there was peace; no one was thinking of war. The Prince, attended only by his Court, went, as is usual during peace, without a guard, to build a tower in Zlоторja. Those traitors, the Germans, fell upon them without any declaration of war, and without any cause. They seized the Prince himself, and, remembering neither God's anger nor that they had received great benefits from the Prince's ancestor, they bound him to a horse and slaughtered his people. The Prince was long a prisoner, and it was only when King Wladyslaw threatened them with war that they released him. It was during this attack that Danusia's mother died."

"And you, sir, were you there? What do they call you? I have forgotten."

"My name is Mikolaj of Dlug-las, and they call me Obuch. I was there. I saw a German, with a plume of peacock's feathers at his crest, bind her to his saddle; then she died of fear. I got a cut from a halberd, and have the scar still."

As he spoke, he pointed to a deep scar on his head running from beneath his hair to his eyebrows.

There was a moment of silence. Zbyszko was again looking at Danusia.

"And you said, sir," he asked, "that she has no knight?"

But he received no answer, for at that moment the singing stopped. One of the rybals, a stout and heavy man, suddenly rose, and the bench tilted up on one side. Danusia tottered and stretched out her hands; but before she could fall or spring to the ground, Zbyszko had darted forward like a wild cat and seized her in his arms.

The Princess, who at first had screamed with fear, now laughed.

"Here is Danusia's knight," she cried. "Come, young Sir Knight, and restore us our dear little girl."

"He grasped her bravely," some among the courtiers were heard to say.

Zbyszko advanced towards the Princess, holding Danusia to his breast. Encircling his neck with one arm, she held the lute with the other, afraid lest it should be broken. Although her face still showed traces of her alarm, she nevertheless smiled and looked pleased.

The youth approached the Princess, set Danusia before her and kneeled. Then, raising his head, he said, with a boldness remarkable in one of his years:

"Let it be, then, according to your word, Gracious Lady! It is time for this gentle damsel to have a knight, and it is time, too, for me to have my lady, whose beauty and virtues I may extol. With your permission, I would make my vow, for I will remain faithful to her in every circumstance until death."

The Princess was surprised, not so much by Zbyszko's words, but by the suddenness of the occurrence. It is true that the custom of making vows was not Polish; but Mazovia, which was situated on the German frontier, and was often visited by knights from distant countries, was more familiar with that custom than the other provinces, and frequently practised it. The Princess had heard concerning it at her father's Court, where all eastern customs were regarded as law for noble warriors. She did not, therefore, see in Zbyszko's action anything that could offend either herself or Danusia. She was even glad that her beloved maiden should have attracted the eyes and the

heart of a knight. So, turning her joyful face towards the girl, she exclaimed:

"Danusia! Danusia! Do you wish to have your own knight?"

The fair-haired Danusia, after jumping three times in her red shoes, clasped the Princess round the neck and began to cry out with joy, as though they were promising her some pleasure permitted only to older people:

"I wish, I wish!"

The Princess's eyes were filled with tears of laughter, and the whole Court laughed with her.

"Well, make your vow, make your vow," said the Princess to Zbyszko. "What will you promise her?"

But Zbyszko, who preserved his gravity undisturbed amid the laughter, said with dignity, while still kneeling:

"I vow that, so soon as I reach Krakow, I will hang my spear on the door of the inn, and on it I will put a card, which a student in writing shall write for me. On the card I will proclaim Panna* Danuta Jurandowna to be the loveliest and most virtuous maiden of all living in this or any other kingdom. Anyone who will oppose this declaration shall fight me until one of us is killed or is made captive."

"Very good! I see you know the knightly custom. And what besides?"

"I have learned from Pan Mikolaj of Dlugolas that the death of Panna Jurandowna's mother was caused by the brutality of a German who bore a plume of peacock's feathers. Therefore I vow to gird my naked sides with a hempen rope, and even though it gnaw me to the bone I will wear it until I tear three such plumes from the heads of German warriors whom I will slay."

Here the Princess became grave.

"Do not transform your vow into a jest," said she.

"So help me God and the Holy Cross!" Zbyszko went on; "this vow I will repeat in church before a priest."

"It is a praiseworthy thing," said the Princess, "to fight against the enemy of our people; but I pity you, for you are young, and you may easily perish."

At this moment Macko of Bogdaniec approached, thinking it proper to reassure the Princess.

"Gracious Lady, have no fear of that. War is neither new nor strange to this youth; for, although he is but a

* The title given to an unmarried lady.

youth, he has fought on horseback and on foot, with spear and with axe, with short sword and with long sword, with lance and without. It is a new custom for a knight to vow to a maiden whom he sees for the first time; but I do not blame Zbyszko for his promise. He has fought the Germans before. Let him fight them again, and if, during that fight, a few heads are broken, his glory will be the greater."

"I see that we have to do with a gallant knight," said the Princess. Then, turning to Danusia, she said: "Take my place as chief person to-day; only do not laugh, for that is not dignified."

Danusia took the place of the Princess and tried to be dignified, but her blue eyes were laughing at the kneeling Zbyszko, and she could not keep from tapping her feet with joy.

"Give him your gloves," said the Princess.

Danusia pulled off her gloves and handed them to Zbyszko, who pressed them to his lips with great respect.

"I will wear them on my helm," he said, "and woe to the man who stretches out his hand for them!"

He kissed Danusia's hands and feet, and rose up. Then his dignity left him, and joy filled his heart, for he knew that from that time the whole Court must regard him as a grown man. So, shaking Danusia's gloves, he cried, half in mirth and half in anger:

"Come, you dogs with peacock plumes! Come!"

But at that moment the monk who had before visited them entered the inn, and with him came two of his superiors. The servants of the monastery carried willow baskets, containing bottles of wine and other dainties. The monks greeted the Princess, and again chided her because she had not gone directly to the abbey. She again explained to them that, having slept during the day, she was travelling by night on account of the cool air, and did not need any sleep, and that, as she did not wish to awaken the worthy abbot and monks, she preferred to stop at an inn merely to rest her limbs.

After many courteous words, it was finally agreed that, after matins and mass in the morning, the Princess, with her Court, should breakfast and rest in the monastery. The hospitable monks also invited the Mazovians, the two noblemen, and Macko of Bogdaniec, who had intended going to the abbey to deposit the wealth acquired in the

wars, and increased by Prince Witold's munificent gift. This treasure was destined to redeem Bogdaniec from pledge.

But young Zbyszko did not hear the invitation. He had rushed to the waggon guarded by his servants, to procure some better apparel for himself. He ordered his chests to be carried to one of the rooms of the inn, and there he began to dress. First, he hastily combed his hair and put it in a silken net ornamented with amber beads, and, in the front, with real pearls. Then he put on a yaka of white silk, embroidered with golden griffins; he girded himself with a golden belt, from which hung a small sword in an ivory scabbard ornamented with gold. Everything was new, glistening, and unspotted with blood, although the accoutrement had been taken as booty from a Frisian knight serving with the Knights of the Cross. He then put on a pair of gorgeous trousers, one half of which was striped red and green, and the other yellow and purple, both terminating together at the top in checkers like a chessboard. Finally, he put on red shoes with long points. Looking fresh and handsome, he returned to the room.

As he stood in the door, indeed, his appearance made a great impression. The Princess, seeing now how handsome a knight had made his vow to Danusia, hastened gracefully towards him. But either the beauty of the young man or the exclamations of admiration from the courtiers caused her to pause before she reached him, drop her eyes suddenly, and, with a blush of confusion, begin to wring her hands. After her came the others. Like the Princess herself, the courtiers, the ladies-in-waiting, the rybals, and the monks were all eager to see him. The young Mazovian girls gazed at him as at a rainbow, each regretting that he had not chosen her; the older ones admired his costly dress; and thus a circle of curious eyes was formed around him.

Zbyszko stood in the centre with a proud smile on his youthful face, turning himself slightly so that they might see him better.

"Who is he?" asked one of the monks.

"He is a knight, the nephew of that wloodyka," answered the Princess, pointing to Macko. "He has made a vow to Danusia."

The monk showed no surprise, for such a vow did not bind one. Vows were often made to married women, and

among the powerful families where the eastern custom was known, almost every woman had her knight. If a knight made a vow to a damsel, he did not thus become her betrothed; on the contrary, he usually married some other maiden; he was constant to his vow, but did not hope to be wedded to the object of it.

The monks were struck by Danusia's youth, although it should by no means have astonished them. In those days, youths of sixteen were frequently castellans. The great Queen Jadwiga, when she came from Hungary, was only fifteen years old, and at thirteen it was quite customary for girls to marry. At that moment, however, the monks were more occupied in looking at Zbyszko than at Danusia. They also listened to the words of Macko, who, proud of his nephew, was relating how the youth came to be possessed of such magnificent garments.

"One year and nine weeks ago," said he, "we were invited by the Saxon knights. There was another guest, a certain knight from a far Frisian land. With him was his son, who was three years older than Zbyszko. One day at a banquet the son began to taunt Zbyszko because he had neither moustache nor beard. Zbyszko, being quick-tempered, immediately seized him by the moustache and pulled out all the hair. In consequence of this, we afterwards fought to death or slavery."

"What do you mean?" asked the Pan of Dlugolas.

"The father took his son's part, and I took Zbyszko's; we therefore fought, in the presence of the guests, on level ground. The agreement was that the conqueror should take everything belonging to the vanquished. God helped us. We slew these Frisians, although with much labour, for they were brave and strong. We took much valuable booty. There were four waggons, each drawn by two horses, four enormous stallions, ten servants, and two excellent suits of armour, such as are not readily to be found. It is true we broke their helms in the fight, but the Lord Jesus rewarded us with something else, for there was a large chest of costly clothing, and in it we found that in which Zbyszko is now dressed."

The two noblemen from the neighbourhood of Krakow, and all the Mazovians, now began to look with more respect on both uncle and nephew, and the Pan of Dlugolas, called Obuch, said:

"I see you are redoubtable fellows."

"We can now well believe," said another, "that this youngster will capture his three peacock plumes."

Macko laughed; an expression like that of a beast of prey moved across his face.

Meanwhile, the servants of the monastery had removed the wine and the dainties from the willow baskets, while the servant maids brought in large dishes full of steaming boiled eggs, garnished with sausage, the strong savoury smell of which filled the whole room. The sight excited every one's appetite, and all rushed to the tables.

None sat down, however, until the Princess had taken her place at the head of the table. Having done so, she told Zbyszko and Danusia to sit opposite her.

"It is right for you both," she said, addressing the youth, "to eat from one dish; but do not tread on her feet beneath the table, or touch her with your knees, as other knights do with their ladies, for she is yet too young."

"I shall not do so, Gracious Lady," he answered, "for two or three years yet, until the Lord Jesus permits me to accomplish my vow, and then this little berry will be ripe; and, as for treading on her feet, even if I cared to do so, I could not, for they do not touch the floor."

"True," answered the Princess; "but it is pleasant to see that you have good manners."

Then there was silence, for all were busy eating. Zbyszko chose the best pieces of food, which he either handed to Danusia or put directly into her mouth, and she was glad to have such a famous knight to serve her. After they had emptied the dishes, the servants of the monastery began to pour out the sweet-smelling wine, abundantly for the men, more sparingly for the ladies. Zbyszko's gallantry was especially shown when the nuts, which had been sent from the monastery, were brought in. He did not think only of himself; he preferred to show the Princess and Danusia his knightly strength and abstinence. Therefore he did not put the nuts between his jaws, as the others did, but crushed them between his fingers, and handed to Danusia the kernels picked from the shells. He even designed a diversion for her. After having picked out the kernel, he placed his hand near his mouth, and, with a powerful blast, blew the shells to the ceiling. Danusia laughed so much that the Princess, perceiving how merry the girl was, asked:

"Well, Danusia, is it good to have your own knight?"

"Oh, very good!" answered the girl.

Then, touching Zbyszko's white silk yaka with her pink finger, she asked:

"And will he be mine to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, and Sunday, and until death!" answered Zbyszko.

The supper lasted a long time, for after the nuts some sweet cakes with raisins were served. Some of the courtiers wished to dance, others to listen to the rybalts' or to Danusia's singing; but she was tired, and having with great confidence laid her head on the knight's shoulder, she fell fast asleep. But she was awakened neither by the rybalts' music nor by the singing. Some of the courtiers stamped, others rattled the dishes in time to the music; but the greater the noise the more soundly she seemed to sleep. Only when the cocks were beginning to crow and the church bells to ring did she awake. The whole company then rushed from the benches, shouting:

"To matins! To matins!"

"Let us go on foot, for God's glory," said the Princess, and she took Danusia by the hand and led the way, followed by the whole Court.

Dawn was beginning to break. In the east one could see a vivid light, green above, pink beneath, and, under all, a golden red, which seemed to grow before the sight. It seemed as if the moon were retreating before this radiance. The light grew rosier and brighter. Moist with dew, the joyous world awoke from its repose.

"God has given us fair weather, but we shall have great heat," said one of the courtiers.

"No matter," answered the Pan of Dlugolas, "we shall sleep in the abbey, and reach Krakow towards evening."

"And sure of a feast," said another.

"There is a feast every day now, and after the lying-in and the tournaments there will be still greater feasting."

"We shall doubtless see how Danusia's brave knight will acquit himself."

"Oh, they are of oak, those fellows! Did you hear them tell of that fight of four knights on each side?"

"Perhaps they will join our Court; they are consulting with each other now."

The two knights were, indeed, speaking earnestly with each other. Old Macko was not greatly pleased with what

had happened; and, while walking in the rear of the retinue, he said to his nephew:

"In some way, I must reach the King, and it may be he will grant us something. We shall see. We must redeem Bogdaniec from pledge anyhow, for we must hold that which our forefathers held. But how can we get peasants to do the work? Without peasants, the land is worthless. Therefore, listen to what I am going to say: You may make vows or not, as you please, but you must go with the Pan of Mielsztyn to Prince Witold against the Tartars. If they should proclaim the expedition before the Queen's lying-in, then you must not wait either for the lying-in or for the tournaments. Only go, for in this there will be profit. Prince Witold is munificent, as you know; and he knows you. If you acquit yourself well, he will reward you liberally. Above all, if God help you, you will secure many slaves, for the Tartars swarm in the world."

Having said this, Macko, being covetous of land and serfs, began to let his fancy run loose.

"If we could only capture fifty peasants, and settle them in Bogdaniec," he exclaimed, "we should be able to clear quite a tract of forest. You know that nowhere else are so many serfs to be got."

But Zbyszko began to shake his head.

"Pshaw!" said he, "I shall get hostlers from the stables—fellows living on horse-carrion, and useless for tilling the soil. Of what use will they be in Bogdaniec? Then, too, I have vowed to capture three German crests. Where shall I find those among the Tartars?"

"You made a vow because you were foolish, but your vow is worthless."

"But my honour as a wloodyka and a knight! What of that?"

"How was it with Ryngalla?"

"Ryngalla poisoned the Prince, and the hermit gave me absolution."

"Then, in Tyniec, the abbot will absolve you from this vow also. The abbot is greater than any hermit."

"I do not wish for absolution."

"Then how shall it be?" asked Macko, after a pause, with evident anger.

"You must go to Witold yourself, for I will not go."

"Knave! And who will bow before the King? Do not you pity my old bones?"

"Were a tree to fall on your bones, it would not crush them; and even though I pity you, I will not go to Witold."

"Where, then, will you go? Do not you care for Bogdaniec? Will you plough with your nails, seeing that you will not have any peasants?"

"You are mistaken in your reckonings regarding the Tartars," Zbyszko answered. "You have forgotten that it is difficult to catch any prisoners among the Tartars, for one cannot reach them on the steppes. With what horses shall I chase them? With those heavy stallions that we captured from the Germans? Do you not see? And what booty could I take? Scurvy sheepskin coats, but nothing else! How rich, then, I shall return to Bogdaniec! Doubtless they would then call me Count!"

Macko was silent, for there was much truth in Zbyszko's words.

"But Prince Witold will reward you," said he, after an interval of reflection.

"Pshaw! How do you know? To one he gives too much, to another nothing."

"Then, tell me, where will you go?"

"To Jurand of Spychow."

Macko angrily twisted the belt of his leather jacket.

"May you be struck blind!" he said.

"Listen," answered Zbyszko quietly. "I had a talk with Mikolaj of Dlugolas, and he said that Jurand is seeking revenge on the Germans for the death of his wife. I will go and help him. In the first place, you yourself have said that it is nothing new for us to fight the Germans—we know them and their ways so well. Secondly, I shall thus capture those peacock crests the more easily; and in the third place, you know that peacock plumes are not worn by knaves. Therefore, if the Lord Jesus will help me to secure the crests, they will also bring booty. And, finally, the slaves from those parts are not like the Tartars. If you settle such slaves in a forest, then you will have accomplished something."

"Man, are you crazy? There is no war at present, and God knows when there may be one!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Then it is news to you that, although the great armies are not fighting, and although the King and the Grand Master stamped the parchment with their seals, there is always much disturbance

on the frontiers still. If some cattle are seized, they burn several villages for a single cow's head, and besiege the castles besides. What of capturing peasants and maidens? Or merchants, too, on the highways? Remember the old days, of which you have told me yourself. Remember the Nalenczs, who captured forty knights on their way to join the Knights of the Cross, and kept them in prison until the Grand Master sent him a cart full of mark pieces. Did not he do a good piece of business? Jurand of Spychow is doing the same, and on the frontier there is always work ready to one's hand."

For a time they walked on in silence. It was now broad daylight, and the bright rays of the sun shone against the rocks on which the abbey was built.

"Wherever one may be, God can grant good fortune," said Macko at length, with a calm voice. "Pray that He may bless you."

"Surely all depends upon His favour."


"And think of Bogdaniec, for you cannot persuade me that you go to Jurand of Spychow for the sake of Bogdaniec, and not for that duck's beak."

"Do not speak in that fashion, for it makes me angry. I shall see her gladly, that I do not deny. Have you ever seen a prettier maiden?"

"What should I care for her beauty? Better marry her when she is grown up; she is the daughter of a mighty count."

Zbyszko's face brightened with a pleasant smile.

"It shall be so," he cried; "no other lady, no other wife! When your bones are old, you shall play with the grandchildren born to her and myself."

"Grady, Grady!" exclaimed Macko, with an answering smile. "May they be as numerous as hail. When a man is old, children are his joy; and, after death, his salvation. Grant us this, O Jesus!" 

CHAPTER III.

THE Princess Danuta, Macko, and Zbyszko had been in Tyniec before, but some of the courtiers now saw it for the first time. These greatly admired the magnificent abbey, which stood upon a lofty mountain, and now shone in the golden rays of the rising sun. The stately walls and buildings, the gardens, which lay at the foot of the mountain, and the carefully cultivated fields, all showed the great wealth of the abbey. The people from barren Mazovia were amazed. It is true that there were also powerful Benedictine abbeys in other parts of the country, but none of them could compare with the Abbey of Tyniec, which was richer than many a principality, and had an income greater than that enjoyed by many kings.

The Princess, wishing to interest the ladies, begged one of the monks to relate the terrible story of Walgierz Wdaly, which had been told to her in Krakow, although, she declared, not correctly. The ladies hereupon surrounded the Princess and walked more slowly, looking like so many flowers moving in the sunlight.

"Let Brother Hidulf tell about Walgierz, who appeared to him on a certain night," said an aged monk.

"Pious father, have you seen him with your own eyes?" asked the Princess.

"I have seen him," answered the monk gloomily. "There are certain moments when, by God's will, he is permitted to leave the underground regions of hell to show himself to the world."

"When does this happen?"

The old monk looked at the other, and became silent, for there was a tradition that the ghost of Walgierz appeared when the morals of the monastery became corrupted, and the monks thought more of worldly riches and pleasures than it was right that they should. None of them, however, cared to admit this. It was also said,

however, that the ghost's appearance portended war or some other calamity. After a short silence, Brother Hidulf said :

"His appearance assuredly augurs no good fortune."

"I should not care to see him," said the Princess, making the sign of the cross. "But why is he in hell, if it be true, as I have heard, that he only avenged a wrong?"

"Had he been virtuous throughout his whole life," said the monk sternly, "he would have been damned just the same, for he was a heathen, and in him original sin was not washed out by baptism."

At these words the Princess's brows contracted painfully, for she remembered that her father, whom she had loved dearly, died a heathen.

"We are listening," said she, after a pause.

"During the time of heathenism," began Brother Hidulf, "there was a mighty count named Walgierz, whom, on account of his great beauty, they called Wdaly. This whole country, as far as the eye can see, belonged to him, and he led all expeditions ; in these, besides those on foot, there rode a hundred spearmen, all of whom were wloodykas. The men to the east, as far as Opole, and to the west as far as Sandomierz, were his vassals. His herds no one was able to number, and in Tyniec he had a tower full of money, even as the Knights of the Cross now have in Marienburg."

"Yes, they have ; I know it !" interrupted the Princess.

"He was a giant also," continued the monk. "He was so strong that he could pull an oak-tree up by the roots ; and no one in all the world could compare with him for beauty, for playing on the lute, or for singing. Once, when he was at the French Court, the King's daughter, Helgunda, fell in love with him, and fled with him to Tyniec, where they lived together in sin. No priest would marry them, for Helgunda's father had vowed her to the cloister for the glory of God. At that time there lived in Wislica, Wislaw Pienkny, who belonged to King Popiel's family. While Walgierz Wdaly was absent, he devastated the country around Tyniec. Walgierz, on his return, overpowered Wislaw and imprisoned him in Tyniec. But he paid no heed to one strange fact—that every woman, so soon as ever she had seen Wislaw, was ready immediately to leave father, mother, and even husband, if only she

could satisfy her passion. Thus it was with Helgunda. She devised such fetters for Walgierz that that giant, although he could pluck an oak up by its roots, was unable to break them. She delivered him to Wislaw, who took him and imprisoned him in Wislica. But there Rynga, Wislaw's sister, hearing Walgierz singing in his underground cell, loved him greatly and set him at liberty. He then killed Wislaw and Helgunda with the sword, leaving their bodies to the crows, and returned to Tyniec with Rynga."

"Was it not right what he did?" asked the Princess.

"Had he received baptism," Brother Hidulf answered, "and given Tyniec to the Benedictines, perhaps God would have forgiven him his sins; but as he did not do this, therefore the earth has devoured him."

"But were the Benedictines already in this kingdom at that time?"

"No, the Benedictines were not here; only the heathen lived here then."

"How then could he receive baptism, or give up Tyniec?"

"He could not, and that is just why he was sent to hell to endure eternal torture," answered the monk with authority.

"Surely he speaks truth!" several voices were heard to say.

They had now approached the principal gate of the monastery, where the abbot, with a company of monks and nobles, was awaiting the Princess. The abbot was a tall man, with a thin, intelligent face, a fringe of grey hair showing about his tonsure. On his forehead was a deep scar, which he had evidently received during his youth when waging battle as a knight. His eyes glanced penetratingly from beneath his dark eyebrows. He wore the habit of a monk, but over it was a black mantle, lined with purple; around his neck was a gold chain, from which hung a gold cross set with precious stones. His whole bearing indicated a haughty man, one accustomed to command, and with perfect confidence in himself. He greeted the Princess affably, and even humbly, inasmuch as he remembered that her husband belonged to the family of the Princess of Mazovia, from which came King Wladyslaw and King Kazimierz, and that her mother was the reigning Queen over one of the most powerful king-

doms in the world. So he passed the threshold of the gate, and bowed low. Then, having made the sign of the cross over Anna Danuta and her Court, he said :

"Welcome, Gracious Lady, to the threshold of this poor monastery. May Saint Benedict of Nursja, Saint Maurice, Saint Boniface, Saint Benedict of Aniane, and also John of Tolomeia, our patrons living in eternal glory, give you health and happiness, and bless you seven times daily throughout the remainder of your life!"

"They would be deaf did they not hear the words of so great an abbot," replied the Princess courteously. "We have come to hear mass, during which we place ourselves under their protection."

Having said this, she stretched out her hand to him; and he, falling on one knee, kissed it in knightly fashion. They then passed through the gate. The monks were evidently awaiting their arrival, for the bells were rung immediately; the trumpeters at the church door sounded a blast in honour of the Princess. All churches made a great impression upon her, for she had not been born in a Christian country. The edifice in Tyniec affected her profoundly, as well it might, for there were very few churches that could rival it in magnificence. The whole interior was dark, except at the main altar, where many lights shone, brightening the carvings and gildings. A monk, wearing a chasuble, came from the vestry, saluted the Princess, and began the mass. The fragrant smoke from the incense arose, veiling the priest and the altar, mounting in silent clouds towards the vaulted ceiling, and deepening the solemn beauty of the scene. Anna Danuta bent her head and prayed fervently. But when the organ, rare in those times, began to shake the nave with its majestic thunderings and to fill it with angelic voices, then the Princess raised her eyes, and her face gave expression to a boundless delight, mingled with devotion and awe, so that one looking on her might well have fancied her to be some saint beholding the heavens opened in some marvellous vision. Thus prayed Kiejstut's daughter, who, born in heathenism, yet in her daily life mentioned God's name as familiarly as did every one else in those times. But here in the Lord's house she raised her thoughts with fear and humility towards the secret and immeasurable power of the Divine.

The whole Court prayed devoutly, although, perhaps,

with less humility. Zbyszko knelt among the Mazovians and committed himself to God's protection. From time to time he glanced at Danusia, who was sitting beside the Princess, and told himself it was an honour to be the knight of such a damsel. To him his vow was altogether solemn. He had already girded his sides with the hempen rope, but this was only half of his vow; it was still necessary to fulfil the other half, a task which he knew was more difficult. Now, therefore, that he was more earnest than when in the inn drinking ale, he was anxious to discover how he could set about the work. True, there was no war; yet amid the disturbances on the frontier he might encounter some Germans, and either slay them or lay down his own life. This he had told to Macko.

"Not every German," he now reflected, "wears peacock or ostrich feathers on his helm. Only a few among the guests of the Knights of the Cross are counts; the Knights of the Cross themselves are only komthurs,* and not even all of them. Should there be no war, then years may pass before I can get these three crests; I have not been really knighted yet, and can challenge only those who are not knights. It is true I expect to receive a knight's girdle from the King's hands during the tournaments which have been announced to take place during the christening, but what will happen then? I will go to Jurand of Spychow; he will help me kill as many knechts as possible; but that will benefit me but little. The knechts are not knights with peacock plumes at their crests."

In his uncertainty, seeing that without God's special favour he could do nothing, he began to pray:

"Jesus, grant a war against the Knights of the Cross—against the Germans, who are the foes of this kingdom and of all other nations confessing Thy Holy Name! They have hatred in their hearts against us, being angry because our King and Queen have forbidden them to cut down Thy Christian servants with the sword. For which anger punish them, O Lord!

"And I, Zbyszko, a sinner, repent before Thee, and by Thy five wounds I entreat Thy help, that in Thy mercy Thou mayest permit me to slay, as soon as may be, three Germans bearing peacock plumes on their morions. These crests I have vowed upon my knightly honour to Panna Anna Danuta, Jurand's daughter, and Thy servant.

* Commanders.

"And if I find any booty on such vanquished Germans, I will faithfully pay to Holy Church the tithe thereof, in order that Thou also, sweet Jesus, mayest have some benefit and glory through me, and also that Thou mayest know that I promise this to Thee with a sincere heart. As this is true, so help me! Amen!"

But as he prayed, his heart softened under the influence of his devotions, and he made another vow, which was that, after having redeemed Bogdaniec from pledge, he would give to the Church all the wax which the bees should make during a whole year. Joy now filled his soul. He was almost assured that his prayer would be heard, and that the war would speedily come, so that he might accomplish his vow. He felt such power in his legs and in his arms that at this moment he would have attacked a whole army. He even thought that, having increased his promises to God, he ought also to add a couple of Germans for Danusia. Although his youthful anger urged him to this, prudence prevailed, as he was afraid of exhausting God's patience by asking too much.

The wives of the reigning kings and princes were very kindly disposed towards the Knights of the Cross, not only from motives of piety, but also on account of the magnificent presents sent them by the Master of the Order. Even the pious Jadwiga, as long as she lived, restrained her husband's anger against them. Anna Danuta alone, having experienced terrible wrongs at the hands of the knights, hated them with her whole soul. So, when the abbot asked her about Mazovia and its affairs, she began to complain bitterly against the Order.

"Our affairs," said she, "are in a bad condition; but with such neighbours, how can it be otherwise? This is said to be a time of peace; ambassadors and letters are exchanged, but, notwithstanding all this, no one can be sure of anything. Neither oaths, nor seals, nor parchments protect from treachery. Thus it happened at Zlotorja, where they seized and imprisoned the Prince during a time of peace. The Knights of the Cross said that our castle was a menace to them; but the castles are repaired for defence, and not for attack. And what Prince has not the right to build and repair on his own land? Neither the weak nor the powerful can agree with the Order, for its knights despise the weak, while they endeavour to ruin the mighty. Good deeds they repay

with evil. Is there anywhere in the world another Order which has received so many benefits from other kingdoms as these knights have received from Polish Princes? And how have they repaid them? With threats, with the devastation of our lands, with war, and with treachery. And it is useless to complain, for they will not listen to the Roman Pope himself. They have sent an embassy now for the Queen's lying-in and the expected christening, but only because they wish to appease the anger of this mighty King at the evil deeds they do in Lithuania. But in their hearts they are always plotting means to annihilate this kingdom and the whole Polish nation."

The abbot listened attentively, and with some show of approval.

"I know that (Komthur Lichtenstein) came to Krakow at the head of the embassy," he said. "He is very much respected in the Order for his bravery and intelligence. Perhaps you will see him here soon, Gracious Lady, for he sent me a message yesterday saying that, as he wished to pray to our holy relics, he would pay a visit to Tyniec."

Upon hearing this, the Princess resumed her complaints:

"The people say—and, I am sure, rightly—that there will soon be a great war, in which the kingdom of Poland and all the nations speaking a kindred tongue will take one side, and the Germans and the Order the other. Some saint has made a prophecy concerning this war."

"Saint Bridget," interrupted the scholarly abbot. "Eight years ago she was canonised. The pious Peter of Alvastra and Matthew of Linkoping have written her revelations, in which a great war has indeed been predicted."

At these words Zbyszko trembled; and, being unable to restrain himself, he asked:

"How soon will this be?"

But the abbot was occupied with the Princess, and did not hear—perhaps did not wish to hear—the question.

"Our young knights are glad that this war is coming," the Princess continued, "but the older and more prudent men say: 'We are not afraid of the Germans, although their pride and power are great; but we are afraid of their relics, for against those all human might is powerless.'"

"They say they have a true piece of the Holy Cross;

how, then, can one fight against them?" added Anna Danuta in a softer voice, looking timidly at the abbot.

"The French King sent it to them," answered the abbot.

There was a moment of silence, then Mikolaj of Dlugolas, surnamed Obuch, a man of great experience said:

"I have been in captivity among the Knights of the Cross; I have seen a procession in which they carried this great relic. But besides this there are many other relics at the monastery in Oliva, without which the Order would never have acquired such power."

"Tell us, what are they?" exclaimed the Benedictines with much curiosity.

"There is a piece of the robe of the Most Holy Virgin," answered the Wlodyka of Dlugolas; "there is a molar tooth of Mary Magdalene, and branches from the bush in which God the Father revealed Himself to Moses; there is a hand of Saint Liberius; and as for the bones of other saints, I could not count them on the fingers of both hands and the toes of both feet."

"How then can one fight them?" repeated the Princess, sighing.

The abbot frowned, and, having thought for a while, said:

"For this reason it is, indeed, hard to fight against them. They are monks, and they wear the cross on their mantles. But if they have exceeded the measure of their sins, then even those relics will refuse to remain with them. In that case, they will not strengthen the knights, but will take their strength away, so that the relics may pass into more pious hands. May God spare Christian blood; but, if a great war should come, there are relics in our kingdom also which will succour us."

"May God help us!" exclaimed Zbyszko.

The abbot turned towards the Princess, and continued:

"Therefore, have confidence in God, Gracious Lady, for their days are numbered rather than yours. In the meanwhile, accept with grateful heart this casket, in which there is a finger of Saint Ptolemæus, one of our patrons."

The Princess extended her hand, and, kneeling, accepted the casket, which she immediately pressed to her lips. The courtiers shared the joy of the lady. But Zbyszko was happy because it seemed to him that, immediately after the festivals at Krakow, there must be war.

CHAPTER IV.

It was in the afternoon that the Princess left hospitable Tyniec and went towards Krakow. With her went Macko and Zbyszko in full armour, for the knights of those times, on entering the larger cities or castles to visit some eminent person, were wont to put on their entire battle accoutrement. Mikolaj of Dlugolas, who had seen the world and many knights, and was very expert in judging the trappings of war, at once perceived that their suits had been made by a most famous armourer of Milan, and that they were such as only the richest could afford, for each of them was worth a fortune. He therefore concluded that, among their own people, the Frisians had been mighty lords, and looked with more respect on Macko and Zbyszko. Both rode near the carriage in which the Princess was seated, accompanied by Danusia, Ofka, a dignified lady of the Court and the widow of Christian of Jarzombkow, and old Mikolaj of Dlugolas. Danusia looked with great interest at the two knights, while the Princess, taking the casket with the relic of Saint Ptolemæus from her bosom, raised it to her lips from time to time.

"I am very anxious to see what bones are inside," said she; "but I shall not open it myself, for I do not wish to offend the Saint. In Krakow the Bishop will open it."

To this the cautious Mikolaj of Dlugolas answered:

"Ah! it will be well not to let this out of your Highness's hands; it is far too precious a thing."

"It may be that you are right," said the Princess, after a moment's reflection. "It is long," she added, "since anyone has given me so much pleasure as the worthy abbot has by this present; and he has calmed my fears, moreover, regarding the relics owned by the Knights of the Cross."

"He spoke wisely and well," said Macko of Bogdaniec. "At Wilno, also, they had relics, and they wished to

persuade the guests that these fought against the heathen. What then? Our knights observed that, if they could only give a blow with the axe, the helm of the enemy gave way immediately, and his head fell. The saints help—it would be sin to say otherwise—but they only help the righteous who go to war justly in God's name. Therefore, Gracious Lady, I think that if there be another war, even if all the Germans help the Knights of the Cross, we shall overcome them. As for relics, have we not a true particle of the holy cross in the monastery of Holy Cross?"

"It is true, as God is dear to me," said the Princess. "But our relics will remain in the monastery, while, if necessary, they will carry theirs."

"No matter! There is no limit to the power of God."

"Is that true?" asked the Princess, turning to the wise Mikolaj of Dlugolas. "Tell me, how is it?"

"Every bishop will affirm it," he replied. "Though Rome is distant, yet the Pope rules over the whole world. Cannot God do even more?"

These words soothed the Princess so completely that she began to converse about Tyniec, and about the wealth and beauty of the whole country through which they were now riding. All around were flourishing villages; near them lay orchards full of trees, linden groves, with storks' nests in the trees, while beneath were beehives with their roofs of straw. Along the highway on both sides were fields full of every sort of grain. From time to time the wind undulated the still green sea of grain, in which the blue heads of the bachelor's buttons and the bright red of the wild poppies glittered like stars in the sky. Beyond the fields appeared the forests, black in the distance, but, nearer, bathed in sunlight; while here and there were to be seen moist meadows, with birds hovering among the bushes. Now there were hills dotted with houses; now broad fields; and as far as the eye could see, the land seemed a land of milk and honey, of happiness and peace.

"This," said the Princess, "is the rural economy of King Kazimierz. It must, indeed, be a pleasure to live here."

"The Lord Jesus rejoices to see such a country," answered Mikolaj of Dlugolas, "and God's blessing is over it. But how could it be otherwise? When they ring the church bells, there is no corner where they cannot be heard. And it is known that no evil spirits can endure

the ringing of the bells; they are obliged to flee to the forests on the Hungarian frontier."

"I wonder, then," said Pani* Ofka, the widow of Christian of Jarzombkow, "how Walgierz Wdaly, of whom the monk was speaking, can appear in Tyniec, where they ring the bells seven times a day."

This remark embarrassed Mikolaj for a moment, but, after a little thought, he answered quietly:

"In the first place, God's decrees are inscrutable; and then it must be remembered that every time this spirit appears he has special permission."

"In any case, I am glad that we shall not pass the night in the monastery. I should die of fear were I to see such a diabolical monster."

"Ah, I doubt it! For they say he is very handsome."

"If he were ever so beautiful, I should never desire the kiss of a man from whose lips one might smell sulphur."

"I see that, even when the conversation is of devils, you still think about kisses."

At these words the Princess, Pan Mikolaj, and both the wloidykas of Bogdaniec began to laugh. Danusia laughed also, following the example of the others. But Ofka of Jarzombkow turned her angry face towards Mikolaj of Dlugolas.

"I, at least, should prefer him to you," said she.

"Oh, do not call the wolf out of the forest!" answered the merry Mazovian. "The ghost often wanders on the high road between Krakow and Tyniec, especially towards night. Suppose he should hear you, and appear to you in the form of a giant?"

"Let the enchantment fall upon the dog!" answered Ofka.

At this moment Macko of Bogdaniec, who, seated on a tall stallion, could see further than those who were in the carriage, reined in his horse.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "as God is dear to me, what is this?"

"What?"

"Some giant of the forest is approaching!"

"And the word became flesh!" exclaimed the Princess. "Do not say so!"

"It is true; it is the giant Walgierz, and none other!" said Zbyszko, rising in his stirrups.

* The title given to a married lady.

At this the coachman pulled up the horses, and, still holding the reins, began to make the sign of the cross, for he, too, discerned on an opposite hill the gigantic figure of a horseman. The Princess had risen, but she now sat down again, her features drawn with fear. Danusia had hidden her face in the folds of the Princess's dress. The courtiers, ladies, and rybalts, who were on horseback behind the carriage, having heard the ill-omened name, hastened to surround the carriage. The men tried to smile, but there was fear in their eyes. The young girls were pale. Mikolaj of Dlugolas alone maintained his composure.

"Do not fear, Gracious Lady," said he, wishing to tranquilise the Princess. "The sun has not yet set; and even if it were night, Saint Ptolemæus would be able to overcome Walgierz."

Meanwhile, the unknown horseman, having mounted the top of the hill, stopped his horse and stood motionless. In the rays of the setting sun he could be seen very distinctly, and certainly his stature seemed greater than that of any ordinary man. The space separating him from the Princess's retinue was now not more than three hundred paces.

"Why does he stop?" asked one of the rybalts.

"Because we have stopped," answered Macko.

"He is looking towards us as if he would like to challenge some one," said another rybalt; "if I were sure that he was a man and not an evil spirit, I would go and give him a blow on the head with my lute."

The women began to pray aloud; but Zbyszko wished to show his courage to the Princess and Danusia.

"I will go, nevertheless," he said, turning towards them. "I am not afraid of Walgierz!"

Although Danusia began to scream: "Zbyszko! Zbyszko!" he pressed forward and rode swiftly, confident that, if he did meet even the true Walgierz, he should pierce him through and through with his spear.

"He looks like a giant because he is on the hill," said Macko, who had keen sight. "He is some big man, but a mortal—naught else! Well, I too will go, to see that he does not quarrel with Zbyszko."

As he rode, Zbyszko debated whether he should immediately attack the stranger with the spear, or whether he should first take a nearer view of the man standing on

the hill. He decided to view him first, and soon persuaded himself that this was the better thought, for, as he approached, the stranger began to lose his extraordinary size. He was a tall man, and was mounted on a big horse, one even bigger than Zbyszko's stallion, yet he did not exceed human stature. Moreover, he was without armour, and wore a velvet bell-shaped cap and a dust-cloak of white linen, beneath which a green dress could be seen. As he stood motionless on the hill, it seemed that he was praying. He had apparently stopped his horse in order that he might finish his evening devotions.

"It is not Walgierz," thought the youth.

He had now approached so close that he could have touched the unknown man with his spear. The man, who was plainly a knight, smiled at him benevolently.

"Let Jesus Christ be praised!" he said.

"For ever and ever!" responded Zbyszko.

"Is that the Court of the Princess of Mazovia below?"

"It is."

"Then you come from Tyniec?"

But he received no answer, inasmuch as Zbyszko was in a state of such amazement that he did not even hear the question. For a moment he stood like a statue, scarcely believing his own eyes; for, about half a furlong behind the unknown man, came several soldiers on horseback, at the head of whom rode a knight, clad in full armour, and wearing a mantle of white cloth marked with a black cross, and a steel helm with a magnificent tuft of peacock feathers at its crest.

"A Knight of the Cross!" whispered Zbyszko. Now, thought he, God had indeed heard his prayers; He had sent him the German knight for whom he had asked in Tyniec. Surely he must take advantage of God's graciousness. Without any hesitation, therefore—almost before these thoughts had passed through his head, and while his first astonishment was yet undiminished—he bent low in his saddle, couched his spear, and, shouting the war-cry of his house, "Grady! Grady!" bore down at full speed upon the Knight of the Cross.

The knight, too, was astonished. He stopped his horse, and, without lowering his spear, gazed before him, uncertain whether or not the attack was directed against him.

"Lower your spear!" shouted Zbyszko, pricking his

horse with the iron points of his stirrups. "Grady! Grady!"

The distance separating them grew less. The Knight of the Cross, seeing that he was really attacked, reined in his horse and poised his spear. But just as Zbyszko's lance had almost touched the other's breast, a powerful hand broke it like a reed. The same hand then reined in Zbyszko's horse with such force that the charger stopped as if it had been rooted to the earth.

"Madman, what are you doing?" asked a deep, threatening voice. "You are attacking an envoy; you are insulting the King!"

Zbyszko glanced round and recognised the gigantic horseman who, mistaken for the giant Walgierz, had so frightened the Princess and her Court.

"Let me go against the German," he cried, seizing his axe. "Who are you?"

"Away with the axe, for God's sake!" shouted the stranger more threateningly. "Away with the axe, I say, or I will throw you from your horse! You have offended the King's majesty, and you will be punished."

Then, turning towards the soldiers who were riding behind the Knight of the Cross, he cried:

"Advance!"

At this moment Macko appeared, a threatening look in his face. He knew well that Zbyszko had played the part of a madman, and that the consequences of this affair might be very serious; but he was none the less ready to defend the lad. The whole retinue of the stranger and of the Knight of the Cross contained only fifteen men, armed with spears and crossbows, so that two knights in full armour might fight them with some hope of being victorious. Macko also thought that, as they were threatened with punishment, it would be better to avoid it by overcoming their opponents, and afterwards hiding themselves until the storm had passed over. So now his face grew harsh, and his mouth was drawn like the jaws of a wolf ready to bite. He urged his horse between Zbyszko and the stranger, and placed his hand to his sword.

"Who are you?" he demanded, "and what right have you to interfere?"

"My right is this," said the stranger; "the King has intrusted to me the safety of the neighbourhood of Krakow. I am Powala of Taczew."

At these words, Macko and Zbyszko glanced at the knight, returned their half-drawn swords to their scabbards, and bowed their heads, not because they were frightened, but out of respect for a name so great and famous. Powala of Taczew, a nobleman and mighty lord belonging to a powerful family, and the possessor of large estates in the neighbourhood of Radom, was at the same time one of the most celebrated knights in the kingdom. Rybalts sang of him in their songs, citing him as an exemplar of honour and gallantry. At this moment he was the representative of the King, so that to attack him was to put one's head beneath the executioner's axe.

Macko, who had grown calmer, said respectfully :

"All honour and reverence to you, sir, for your fame and for your gallantry."

"Honour be to you also, sir," answered Powala ; "but I should prefer to make your acquaintance under less serious circumstances."

"For what reason?" asked Macko.

Powala turned towards Zbyszko.

"What have you done, youth? You have attacked an envoy on the public highway, as in the King's presence. Do you know the consequences of such an act?"

"He attacked the envoy because he was young and foolish; action, therefore, came easier to him than reflection," said Macko. "But you will not judge him so severely when I have told you the whole story."

"It is not I who shall judge him. My business is but to put him in fetters."

"How so?" asked Macko, his face again becoming dark.

"In virtue of the King's command."

"He is a nobleman," said Macko at last, after a short silence.

"Let him swear, then, upon his knightly honour, that he will appear at the Court."

"I swear!" exclaimed Zbyszko.

"Very well. What do they call you?"

Macko announced the name and the device of his nephew.

"If you belong to the Court of the Princess Janusz, beg her to intercede for you with the King."

"We are not of her Court. We are returning from Lithuania—from Prince Witold. Better for us if we had never met any Court! This misfortune has come of that."

Here Macko began to relate what had happened at the inn. He told of the meeting with the Princess, and of Zbyszko's vow. Suddenly, he was filled with anger against Zbyszko, whose imprudence had caused their present dreadful plight, and, turning towards him, he exclaimed:

"I would rather have seen you dead at Wilno! What have you done, spawn of a wild boar?"

"Well," said Zbyszko, "after my vow I prayed to the Lord Jesus to vouchsafe to me some Germans, and promised Him a gift; so, when I perceived these peacock feathers and the mantle embroidered with a cross, immediately a voice seemed to cry within me: 'Strike the German! It is a miracle!' Well, I then rushed forward. Who would not have done so?"

"Listen!" interrupted Powala. "I do not wish you any evil. I see clearly that this stripling sinned rather from youthful giddiness than from malice. I shall be only too glad to ignore his deed and to go forward as if nothing had happened. But this I cannot do unless that komthur will promise that he will not complain to the King. Beseech him, then; perhaps he also will pity the lad."

"I prefer to go before the Court rather than bow to a Krzyzak!"* exclaimed Zbyszko. "It would not be befitting my dignity as a *wlodyka*."

Powala of Taczew looked at him severely, and said:

"You do not act wisely. Old men know better than you what is right, and what befits a knight's dignity. The world has heard of me; but I tell you that if I had acted as you have acted, I should not be ashamed to ask pardon for my offence."

Zbyszko felt shamed; but, glancing round, he answered:

"The ground is level here. Instead of craving pardon of him, I should prefer to fight him on horseback or on foot, to death or slavery."

"You are foolish!" interrupted Macko. "You now wish to fight the envoy!"

"You must excuse him, noble lord," he said, turning to Powala. "He became wild during the war. It will be better if he does not speak to the German, for he may insult him. I will do so instead. I will entreat his forgiveness. If this komthur be willing to settle it by

* Knight of the Cross.

combat, I will meet him when he has accomplished his mission."

"He is a knight of a great family; he will not encounter everybody," answered Powala.

"What? Do I not wear a belt and spurs? Even a Prince may meet me."

"That is true, but do not tell him so. I fear he will but be angered if you do. Well, may God help you!"

"I am going to humble myself for your sake," said Macko to Zbyszko. "Wait!"

He approached the Knight of the Cross, who had remained motionless as an iron statue on his enormous stallion, listening with the greatest indifference to the preceding conversation. Macko, having learned German during the long war, began to explain to the Komthur, in his own language, what had happened. He excused the boy on account of his youth and violent temper, and finally begged forgiveness for the offence.

The Komthur's face did not move. Calm and haughty, his cold steel-grey eyes regarded Macko with indifference, not unmingled with contempt. This the Wlodyka of Bogdaniec observed. His words continued to be courteous, but his soul began to rebel. His swarthy face flushed, and it was evident that he was endeavouring to restrain his wrath. Powala, seeing this, and having a kind heart, determined to help Macko.

"You see, sir," said he, in a conciliatory and jesting tone, "the noble Komthur thinks the whole affair unimportant. Not only in our own kingdom, but in every country, the young men are somewhat rash. Such a noble as the Knight of Lichtenstein does not fight children, either by sword or law."

Lichtenstein touched his yellow moustache and moved on without a word, passing both Macko and Zbyszko.

A dreadful wrath began to raise the hair beneath their helmets, and their hands grasped their swords.

"Listen, knave!" said the elder wlodyka through his set teeth; "now I will make a vow to you. I will seek you out as soon as you have finished your mission!"

But Powala, whose heart began to bleed, said:

"Wait! The Princess must now speak in favour of the boy; otherwise, woe to him!"

Having said this, he followed the Knight of the Cross, stopped him, and for a while the two talked with great

animation. Macko and Zbyszko saw that the German knight did not regard Powala so haughtily as he had regarded them, and this made them still more angry. After a time, Powala returned and said to them:

"I have tried to intercede for you, but he is a hard man. He says that he will not complain to the King if you will do what he requires."

"And what does he require?"

"He said: 'I will stop to greet the Princess of Mazovia; let them come, dismount, take off their helmets, and, standing on the ground with uncovered heads, ask my forgiveness.'"

Here Powala looked sharply at Zbyszko, and added:

"I know it must be hard for men of noble birth to do this; but I must warn you that, if you refuse, no one knows what may be your fate—perhaps even the executioner's sword."

The faces of Macko and Zbyszko became set like stone. There was silence.

"What, then, do you say?" asked Powala.

Zbyszko answered quietly, and with great dignity, as if, during this conversation, he had added twenty years to his age:

"If I had two heads, and the executioner were about to cut off both, still I have only one honour, and that I will not stain."

Powala became graver, and, turning towards Macko, asked:

"And what do you say?"

"I say," answered Macko gloomily, "that I have reared this youth from childhood. On him depends our family, because I am old. But what the German asks he cannot do, even though he perish."

Here his grim face began to quiver, and, finally, his love for his nephew burst forth with such strength that he seized the boy in his arms, crying:

"Zbyszko! Zbyszko!"

The young knight was surprised, and returned his uncle's embrace.

"Ah! I did not know that you loved me so much," he said.

"I see that you are both true knights," said Powala; "and as the young man has promised me upon his knightly honour that he will appear at Court, I will not

imprison him. The German intends to stay in Tyniec for a day or two, so I shall have an opportunity of seeing the King first, and I will try to tell him of this affair in such a way that his anger may not be aroused. I am glad that I succeeded in breaking the spear in time. That was good fortune—great fortune, I tell you!”

“Even if I had to lay down my life,” Zbyszko answered, “I should have liked to have at least the satisfaction of breaking his bones.”

“It surprises me that you, who know how to defend your own honour, do not understand that thus you would have disgraced our whole nation,” answered Powala impatiently.

“I understand it very well,” said Zbyszko; “but I regret my inability nevertheless.”

“Do you know, sir,” said Powala, turning to Macko, “that, if this lad succeeds in escaping the penalty for his offence, then you ought to put a cowl like a hawk’s on his head! Otherwise, he will never die a natural death.”

“He will escape if you, sir, will not say anything to the King about the occurrence.”

“But what shall we do with the German? We cannot tie his tongue.”

“That is true! That is true!”

Talking thus, they went back towards the Princess and her retinue. Powala’s servants followed them. From afar one could see, amid the Mazovian caps, the quivering peacock feathers of the Knight of the Cross and his bright helm glittering in the sun.

“Strange is the nature of a Knight of the Cross!” said the Knight of Taczew. “When one of them is in a tight place, he will be as forbearing as a Franciscan monk, as humble as a lamb, and as sweet as honey; in a word, it would be difficult to find a better man. But let him have power behind him, then no one will be more arrogant and merciless. It is evident that God has given them stones for hearts. I have seen many different countries, and I have often witnessed a true knight spare another who was weaker, saying to himself: ‘My name will not increase if I trample on this fallen foe.’ But at such a time a Knight of the Cross is implacable. Hold him by the throat; otherwise, woe to you! Such a man is that envoy. He desired not an apology, merely, but your humiliation also. I am glad he has failed to gratify his wish.”

They now approached the retinue, and joined the Princess's Court. The envoy of the Knights of the Cross, having observed them, at once assumed an expression of pride and disdain. They, however, merely ignored him. Zbyszko, who stood at Danusia's side, was telling her that from the hill one could see Krakow; while Macko related tales of the extraordinary strength of the Pan of Taczew, who had broken the spear in Zbyszko's hand, as though it were a dry stem.

"But why did he break it?" asked a rybalt who stood near him.

"Because the boy attacked the German in sport," replied Macko.

The rybalt, being a noble, did not consider such an attack a joke, but seeing that Macko spoke lightly of it, he did not take it seriously either.

The German glanced at Macko and Zbyszko, and presently realised that neither intended to dismount, or, indeed, to pay any attention to him. Then a flash as of steel again gleamed in his eyes, and he immediately began to bid the Princess farewell.

The Lord of Taczew could not refrain from deriding the German at the moment of his departure.

"Go without fear, brave knight!" he cried. "The country is now quiet, and no one will attack you except, perchance, some careless child."

"The customs of this country are strange," answered Lichtenstein. "But I sought your company, and not your protection. I shall expect to meet you again at the Court—and elsewhere."

The last words rang with hidden menace, and Powala answered gravely:

"If God permit!"

Having said this, he saluted and turned away. He then shrugged his shoulders, and said in an undertone, but loud enough to be heard by those who were near:

"Barebones! I could lift you from the saddle with the point of my spear, and hold you in the air for the space of three Paternosters."

He began to talk to the Princess, with whom he was very well acquainted. He told her that the King had commanded him to keep order in the neighbourhood while so many wealthy guests were on their way to Krakow. He then told her of Zbyszko's foolish conduct. But, having

concluded that there would be plenty of time to ask the Princess to protect Zbyszko, he did not lay any stress on the incident, not wishing to spoil the gaiety which prevailed. The Princess laughed at the boy; while the others, having heard of the breaking of the spear, greatly admired the Lord of Taczew, especially as he had done the deed with one hand only.

He, being not a little vain, was pleased by their praise. Presently he began to relate some of the exploits which had made his name famous, more particularly those which he had performed in Burgundy, at the Court of Philip the Bold. There, on one occasion, during a tournament, he seized an Ardenian knight, pulled him out of the saddle, and threw him into the air, although the knight was in full armour. Upon hearing this, they were all much amazed, except Mikolaj of Dlugolas.

"In these effeminate times," said he, "there are no such strong men as there were when I was young. If a noble now happens to shatter a cuirass, to bend a crossbow without the aid of the crank, or to bend a broadsword between his hands, he considers himself to be a man of very great strength. But in times of yore even girls could do such deeds."

"I do not deny that formerly there were stronger folk," answered Powala; "but even now there are some sturdy men. God did not stint me in strength, but I do not consider myself the strongest in this kingdom. Have you ever seen Zawisza of Garbow? He can surpass me."

"I have seen him. He has shoulders as broad as a rampart."

"And Dobko of Olesnica? Once, at the tournament given in Torun by the Knights of the Cross, he defeated twelve knights, to his own and our nation's glory."

"But our Mazovian, Staszko Ciolek, was stronger, sir, than you or your Zawisza and Dobko. They say that he could take a peg made from green wood in his hand and press the sap out of it."

"I can press the sap out myself," said Zbyszko.

And before any one could ask him to prove it, he broke off a branch from a marby tree, which he pressed so strongly that the sap began to ooze from it.

"Ah, Jesus!" exclaimed Ofka of Jarzombkow; "go not to the war. It would be a pity if such a one should perish before marriage."

"It would, indeed, be a pity," replied Macko, suddenly becoming sorrowful.

But Mikolaj of Dlugolas laughed, as did also the Princess. The others, however, praised Zbyszko's strength; and as in those times might was appreciated more than any other quality, the young girls cried out to Danusia: "Be glad!" And, indeed, she was glad, although she could not then understand what benefit she was to receive from a piece of pressed wood. Zbyszko, having forgotten all about the Knight of the Cross, now appeared so haughty that Mikolaj of Dlugolas thought it well to curb his pride.

"There are still better men than you," he said, "therefore do not be so proud of your strength. I did not myself see it, but my father was a witness of something much more difficult, which happened at the Court of Charles, the Roman Emperor. King Kazimierz went to visit him, and with the King went many courtiers. Among these was Zbyszko Ciolek, son of the Palatine Andrew, who was noted for his strength. The Emperor began to boast that he had a Czech who could strangle a bear. They had an exhibition, and the Czech strangled two bears in succession. Our King, not wishing to be outdone, said: 'But he cannot overcome my Ciolek.' It was agreed that they should fight in three days' time. Many ladies and famous knights came, and the Czech and Ciolek grappled in the castle yard. But the contest did not last long. Hardly had they come together before Ciolek broke the backbone of the Czech, crushed all his ribs, and left him dead, to the great glory of the King. Since that time they have called him 'Break-back.'"

"How old was he?" asked Zbyszko.

"He was but a youth," answered Mikolaj.

In the meantime, Powala of Taczew, while riding at the Princess's right hand, bent towards her and told her the truth regarding the gravity of Zbyszko's adventure, begging her to speak to the King in his behalf. The Princess, being fond of Zbyszko, received this news with sadness, and was manifestly uneasy.

"The Bishop of Krakow is a friend of mine," said Powala. "I will ask him and the Queen also to intercede."

"If the Queen will consent to say but one word in his favour, not a hair shall fall from his head," said Anna Anuta. "The King worships her for her piety and for

her dowry, and especially now, when the shame of sterility has been taken from her. But the King's beloved sister, Princess Ziemowit, lives in Krakow; you must go to her besides. For my part, I will do anything I can; but the Princess is his own sister, while I am but his first cousin."

"The King loves you also, Gracious Lady."

"Ah, but not so much," she answered, with a certain sadness; "for me a link, for her a whole chain; for me a fox skin, for her a sable. He loves none of his other relatives so dearly as he loves Alexandra."

Conversing in this fashion, they approached Krakow. The highway, which was crowded on the road from Tyniec, was still more crowded here. They met many countrymen going with their servants to the city. Some of them were on horseback, some travelled in carriages with their wives and daughters, anxious to see the long looked-for tournaments. In certain places the road was crowded with merchants' waggons, loaded with wax, grain, salt, fish, skins, hemp and wood. Others came from the city, containing cloth, barrels of ale, and different sorts of merchandise. Krakow could now be clearly seen. The King's gardens, and the lords' and burghers' houses surrounded the city, while beyond these were the walls and towers of the churches. The nearer they approached the city, the denser grew the traffic, so that at the gates it was almost impossible to pass.

"What a city!" said Macko. "There is none other like it in all the world."

"It is like a fair at all times," answered one of the rybalts. "How long is it since you last were here, sir?"

"Not since a very long time. It seems to me as wonderful now as when I saw it for the first time, for we have but just returned from a wild country."

"They say that Krakow has greatly grown since the time of King Jagiello."

This was, indeed, true. After the Grand Duke of Lithuania ascended the throne large tracts in that country and in Russia were opened to commerce, and, in consequence of this, the city had greatly increased in population, in wealth, and in buildings, and had, indeed, become one of the most important in the world.

"The cities of the Knights of the Cross are very beautiful also," observed the other rybalt.

"If only we could capture one of them!" said Macko. "We should then obtain worthy booty."

But Powala of Taczew was thinking of other matters. His concern was for Zbyszko. The Pan of Taczew, fierce and implacable though he was in war, had nevertheless the heart of a dove within his valorous breast. He realised better than the rest what punishment awaited the offender, and he pitied him.

"I am considering," said he again to the Princess, "whether we ought to tell the King of the incident or not. If the Knight of the Cross does not complain, there will be no case; but if he should complain, perhaps it would be better to tell the King everything beforehand, so that his anger may be averted."

"If a Knight of the Cross has an opportunity to ruin some one, he will do so," answered the Princess. "But I will tell that youth to join our Court. Perhaps the King will be more lenient to one of our courtiers."

She therefore called Zbyszko, who, having had his position explained to him, leaped from his horse, kissed her hands, and declared his readiness to become one of her courtiers, not so much for the sake of his own safety as for the sake of being enabled to remain near Danusia.

"Where will you stay?" asked Powala, of Macko.

"At an inn."

"There will be no room in any inn now."

"Then we will go to Amylej the merchant. He is an acquaintance of mine; perhaps he will let us pass the night in his house."

"Pray accept the hospitality of my house," urged Powala. "Your nephew can stay with the rest of the Princess's courtiers in the castle; but it will be better for him not to be too near the King. You will be more comfortable and safe with me."

Macko had grown uneasy because Powala thought so much about their safety. He thanked them with gratitude, and they entered the city. But here both Macko and Zbyszko forgot all danger for the time in the presence of the wonders they now saw on every side. In Lithuania and on the frontier, they had only seen solitary castles, and the only city of any importance which they knew was Wilno, a badly built and now ruined town. But here many of the merchants' houses were more magnificent than the Grand Duke's palace in Lithuania. In the streets

near the market-place there were many highly ornamented houses of red brick and of stone. These stood side by side like soldiers; some were broad, others narrow, but all were lofty, with vaulted halls, and had very often the symbols of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ or an image of the Most Holy Virgin over the doorway. There were certain streets where two rows of houses could be seen with a road of paved stones between, and a strip of blue sky overhead. Along both sides, as far as one could see, stretched long lines of shops. These were filled with the best foreign merchandise, and at this Macko, accustomed to war and the capture of booty, looked with a longing eye. But the strangers were still more astonished at the sight of the public buildings—the church of Panna Marya in the square; the hall of the broad-cloth merchants; the Town Hall, with its gigantic cellar, in which was sold ale from Swidnica; the countless other churches, the depôts of broad-cloth, the enormous “mercatorium,” devoted to the use of foreign merchants; the building in which the public scales were kept, the bath-houses, the cooper works, wax works, silver works, gold works, the breweries, and the mountains of barrels round the Schrotamto. Here, in a word, were riches which a man, unfamiliar with cities, even though the prosperous possessor of a castle, could never have imagined.

Powala conducted Macko and Zbyszko to his house, which was situated in the Street of Saint Anne, assigned a large room to them, recommended them to his shield-bearers, and then went off to the castle, from which he only returned for supper quite late at night.

A few friends accompanied him, and they enjoyed a plentiful repast of meat and wine. The host alone was sorrowful.

“I have spoken to a canon, learned both in writing and the law,” he said to Macko, when at length the guests had departed. “An insult to an envoy, he says, is a capital offence. Pray God, therefore, that the Knight of the Cross may not complain.”

Hearing this, both knights retired with sorrow in their hearts. Macko could not sleep, and, after lying awake in bed for a time, he said to his nephew.

“Zbyszko!”

“What?”

"I have considered everything, and I greatly fear that they will execute you."

"You think so?" asked Zbyszko in a sleepy voice. Thereupon he turned his face to the wall, and straightway fell sound asleep, so weary was he.

The next day both the wloodykas of Bogdaniec went with Powala to early mass in the Cathedral. On the way, Powala met many acquaintances, and among them several knights famous at home and abroad. Zbyszko looked on these with admiration, promising himself that, if he escaped death for the insult to Lichtenstein, he would try to rival them in gallantry and in all other knightly virtues. One of these knights, Toporczyk, a relative of the castellan of Krakow, told them that Pope Boniface had accepted the King's invitation to the christening, and that, although it was doubtful whether he would be able to come in person, he had authorised the envoy to stand as his proxy as godfather to the coming child. He had, moreover, asked that the name Boniface should be given to the child in proof of his special love for the King and Queen.

There was some talk, also, of the arrival of the Hungarian King, Sigismund. They expected him without fail, for, whether invited or not, he always came whenever there was an opportunity for feasting and tournaments. Of these he was very fond, for he desired to be famous the world over as a ruler, a singer, and the first among knights. Powala, Zawisa of Garbow, Jasko of Olesnica, Naszan, and others of the same rank, recalled with a smile that, during Sigismund's first visit, King Wladyslaw had requested them privately not to attack him very fiercely, but to spare the Hungarian guest, whose vanity, famous throughout the world, had been known to make him weep when defeated.

But the greatest interest among the knights was excited by the affairs of Prince Witold. Marvellous tales were told of the magnificence of the cradle, made of sterling silver, brought by the Lithuanian princes and nobles as a present from Witold and his wife, Anna. Macko spoke of the great expedition proposed against the Tartars. It was then almost ready, and a great army had already gone eastward towards Rus. If this proved successful, it would extend the King's supremacy over almost half the world, to the unknown Asiatic countries, the frontier of Persia,

and the shores of the Aral. Macko, who had formerly served under Witold, and knew his plans, spoke of the expedition so authoritatively and so eloquently, that even before the bells rang for mass, a large circle of curious listeners had gathered round about him. It was in reality, he observed, a question of a crusade.

"Witold himself," he continued, "although they call him Grand Duke, is actually only Viceroy, so that the renown will be the King's. What glory it will be for the newly baptized Lithuanians, as well as for the might of Poland, when the united armies carry the Cross to those countries where, if they now mention the Saviour's name at all, it is but to blaspheme it! When the Polish and Lithuanian armies restore Tochtamysh to the throne of Kapchak, he will acknowledge himself 'the son' of King Wladyslaw; he has sworn to bow before the Cross with the whole of the Golden Horde."

The people listened to Macko with great attention; but many did not thoroughly understand what people Witold intended to help, or against whom he intended to fight. Some one therefore asked:

"Tell us exactly—against whom is this war to be?"

"Against whom?" replied Macko. "Against Timur the Lame!"

After this there was a moment of silence. The eastern knights, it is true, had often heard the names of the Golden, the Blue, the Azovian, and of divers other Hordes; but their minds were not familiar with the civil wars of the Tartars. Nevertheless, there was not one man in Europe who had not heard of the terrible Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane. This name was heard in those days with no less fear than of old was the name of Attila. Timur was "Lord of the World" and "Lord of the Ages"; the conqueror of twenty-seven states; the ruler of Muscovite Russia, of Siberia, and of China, as far as the Indies—of Bagdad, Ispahan, Aleppo, and Damascus; his shadow fell upon the sands of Arabia and Egypt, and upon the waters of the Bosphorus in the Greek Empire. Timur, indeed, was the exterminator of mankind, the terrible builder of pyramids composed of human skulls; he was conqueror in every battle, the invulnerable "Lord of Bodies and of Souls."

Tochtamysh had been placed by him on the throne of

the Golden and the Blue Hordes, and acknowledged as "his son." But when his sovereign authority extended from the Aral to the Crimea, over more lands than were contained in all the rest of Europe, the "son" desired to become an independent ruler. For this he was deposed from his throne with one finger of the terrible father, and he had escaped to the Governor of Lithuania and asked him for help. Witold decided to restore him to his throne, but to do this was to vie with the world-ruler, Timur the Lame. For these reasons his name greatly impressed the audience.

"A difficult business, this," said Kazko of Jaglow, one of the oldest knights, after a short silence.

"And for a trifle," added the prudent Mikolaj of Dlugolas. "What difference will it make to us whether Tochtamysh or some Kútluk rules over the sons of Belial who dwell beyond the tenth-land?"

"Tochtamysh will embrace the faith of Christ," answered Macko.

"He may, or he may not. How can one trust dog-brothers who do not confess Christ?"

"But we are ready to lay down our lives for Christ's name," answered Powala.

"And for knightly honour," added Toporczyk, the relative of the castellan. "There are some among us who will not go; but Spytko of Mielsztyn, the Lord Palatine, though he has a young and beloved wife, has already joined Prince Witold."

"And no wonder," said Jasko Naszan; "for no matter how hideous a sin one may have upon one's soul, pardon and salvation are assured to all who fight in such a war."

"And everlasting fame," added Powala of Taczew. "Let us have a war, then, and the greater it be the better. Timur has conquered the world, and has twenty-seven states under his sway. It will be the greater honour to our nation if we can defeat him."

"Why not," asked Toporczyk, "even though he possessed a hundred kingdoms? Let others be afraid of him—not us! You speak wisely. Let us but gather together ten thousand valiant spearmen, and we may sweep round the world."

"And what nation could conquer The Lame if not ours?"

Thus the knights conversed. Zbyszko now regretted

that he had not gone with Witold to the wild steppes. When in Wilno, he had wished to see Krakow and its Court, and to take part in the tournaments. But now he feared lest he should find only disgrace at Court, while away on the steppes he would, at the worst, have met a glorious death.

But the aged Kazko of Jaglow, who was a hundred years old, and possessed wisdom as great as his years, discouraged the zealous knights.

"You are both rash and foolish!" said he. "Is it possible that none of you have heard what Christ's image has spoken to the Queen? She can see future events as if they were passing before her, and she has thus spoken."

Here he paused for a space, and shook his head, as if in forgetfulness.

"Aha!" said he at length. "Now I remember. The Queen said that if every knight went with Prince Witold against the Lame Man, then would his heathenish power be broken. But all the knights cannot go, because of the faithlessness of Christian lords. We are not only obliged to guard our boundaries from the attacks of the Czechs and the Hungarians, but must also guard our lands from the attacks of the German Order, for we can trust none of them. If, therefore, Witold should set out with only a handful of Polish warriors, then Timur the Lame, or his captains, with their innumerable hosts, will defeat us."

"But we are at peace with them now," said Toporczyk; "therefore the German Order will surely aid Prince Witold. The Knights of the Cross cannot act otherwise, if only for the sake of appearances, and to show the Holy Father that they are ready to fight the pagans. The courtiers say that Kuno von Lichtenstein came not entirely for the christening, but also to consult with the King."

"Here he is!" exclaimed Macko in surprise.

"True!" said Powala, turning his head. "So help me God, it is he! He has not stayed long with the abbot."

"He is in haste," answered Macko gloomily.

Kuno von Lichtenstein passed them. Macko and Zbyszko recognised him by the cross embroidered on his mantle; but he did not recognise either of them, inasmuch as he had only seen them before with their helmets on. As he went by, he nodded to Powala of Taczew, and to Toporczyk; then, with his shield-bearers, he ascended the stairs of the Cathedral with a majestic and stately tread.

At that moment the bells resounded, frightening the flocks of doves from off the roof, and announcing that mass was about to begin. Macko and Zbyszko, troubled at Lichtenstein's hurried return, entered the church with the others. The elder wloodyka was very uneasy, but the younger man's attention was attracted by the King's Court. He was surrounded by noblemen, famous in war and in council. Many of those by whose wisdom the marriage of the Grand Duke of Lithuania with the young and beautiful Queen of Poland had been planned and accomplished were now dead, but a few of them were still living, and on these all looked with the greatest respect. The young knight could not sufficiently admire the magnificent figure of Jasko of Tenczyn, the castellan of Krakow, in whose character sternness was united with dignity and honesty. He admired, too, the wise countenances of the counsellors and the courageous faces of the knights, whose hair, cut evenly over their foreheads, fell in long curls down their backs. He awaited the appearance of the King and the Queen with the greatest curiosity. He advanced toward's the stalls close to the altar, behind which he could see the red velvet cushions on which the King and Queen would kneel during mass.

He had not long to wait. The King entered first, through the door of the vestry, and before it was possible to observe him carefully he had reached the altar. He had long, dishevelled hair; his face was thin and shaven; his nose was large and pointed; and about his mouth were wrinkles. His eyes were small, dark, and glistening. His face had a kind, but cautious look, like that of a man who, having risen by good fortune to a position far beyond his expectations, is obliged to take constant care that his actions correspond to his dignity, and is afraid of malicious criticism. This also was why a certain impatience was discernible both in his face and in his movements. It was very easy to perceive that his anger would be both sudden and terrible. He was that prince who, being angered by the deceit of the Knights of the Cross, had shouted after their envoy:

"Thou comest to me with a parchment, but I will come to thee with a spear!"

But now this natural vehemence was restrained by great and sincere piety. He set a good example, not only

to the recently converted Lithuanian princes, but even to the Polish lords, who had been Christians for generations. Often, for the greater mortification of the flesh, the King would kneel on the bare stones; often, raising his hands, he would hold them uplifted until they dropped with fatigue. He attended at least three masses every day. After mass, he would leave the church with a spirit soothed and gentle, as if he had just awakened from a peaceful slumber. The courtiers knew that this was the best time to ask him either for pardon or for favours.

Queen Jadwiga, too, entered through the vestry door. Seeing her come in, the knights who stood near the stalls at once kneeled, although mass had not begun, voluntarily paying her homage as to a saint, and Zbyszko did likewise. No one in the assembly doubted that he really saw a saint, whose image would some time adorn the altars of the church. In addition to their respect for her as a queen, they almost worshipped her for her religious and holy life. It was reported that she could perform miracles. People said that she could cure the sick by touching them with her hand; that cripples who could not move their legs or arms were restored after putting on a dress which the Queen had worn. Trustworthy witnesses affirmed that, with their own ears, they had heard Christ speak to her from the altar. Foreign monarchs worshipped her on their knees, and even the Order of the Knights of the Cross respected her, and feared to offend her. Pope Boniface IX. called her the pious and chosen daughter of the Church. The world wondered at her deeds, for it knew that this child of the house of Anjou and the Polish Piasts, this daughter of the powerful Louis, a pupil of the most fastidious of Courts, and also one of the most beautiful women on earth, had renounced her first love and her own happiness, and, though a queen, married a wild prince of Lithuania, in order to bring to the Cross, by his help, the last pagan nation in Europe. That which could not be accomplished by the forces of all the Germans and a sea of bloodshed had been done by one word from her. Never did the glory of a disciple shine over a younger and more charming brow; never was apostleship united with a like self-denial; never was the beauty of a woman illumined by such angelic tenderness and such resigned repose.

Minstrels sang of her in every European Court; knights

from the remotest countries came to Krakow to see this "Queen of Poland"; her own people loved her as the apple of their eye, for the power and glory of the land had been increased by her marriage with Jagiello. Only one great sorrow hung over her and the nation: for long years this child of God had had no child.

But this sorrow had passed away, and now the joyful news of God's blessing on the Queen had sped like lightning from the Baltic to the Black Sea, even to the Carpathians, filling with joy all the peoples of this powerful kingdom. In all foreign Courts, except in the capital of the Teutonic Knights, the news was received with joy. In Rome a "Te Deum" was sung. In the provinces of Poland the belief was firmly established that anything the saintly lady asked of God would be granted.

On this account, invalids came to beseech her to ask health for them; envoys came from the provinces and from other countries to ask that she should pray according to their need, either for rain, for fair weather for harvesting or gleaning, for abundant fishing in the lakes, or for game in the forests.

Those knights living in castles on the frontiers who, following the customs of their German neighbours, had become robbers or waged war among themselves, put their swords in their scabbards at the command of the Queen, released their prisoners without ransom, restored the herds they had stolen, and clasped hands in friendship. Every sort of misery, every sort of poverty, crowded the gates of her castle in Krakow. Her pure spirit penetrated human hearts, softening the hard lot of the serfs, the haughty pride of the lords, the unjust severity of the judges, and hovering over the whole country like a dove bearing happiness on its wings—like an angel of justice and peace. It was no wonder, then, that all awaited the day of blessing with anxious hearts.

The knights looked closely at the figure of the Queen, to see if they could ascertain how long they would be obliged to wait for the future heir to the throne. Bishop Wysz of Krakow, who was also the ablest physician in the country, and famous even abroad, had not yet announced when the delivery would take place. Some of the preparations had already been made, for it was then the custom to begin all festivals as early as possible, and to prolong them for weeks. The figure of the lady,

indeed, although a little rounded, had retained until now all its grace. She was dressed with extreme simplicity. Having been brought up at a brilliant Court, and being more beautiful than any of the princesses of her time, she had been fond of costly fabrics, of chains, pearls, gold bracelets, and rings; but now, as for several years past, she not only wore the dress of a nun, but even covered her face, fearing that the thought of her beauty might arouse in her worldly vanity. It was in vain that Jagiello, learning of her condition, in a rapture of joy ordered that her sleeping apartment should be decorated with brocade and jewels. Having renounced all luxury, and remembering that the time of confinement is often the time of death, she determined that it behoved her to receive the blessing which God had promised to send her, not in the midst of jewels, but in unostentatious humility. The gold and jewels, therefore, went to establish a college, and to send the newly converted Lithuanian youths to foreign universities. The Queen would only consent to change her monastic dress, and from the time that the hope of maternity was changed to actual certainty, she did not veil her face, thinking that the dress of a penitent was no longer seemly.

All now gazed with love at that beautiful face, to which neither gold nor precious stones could add any charm. The Queen walked slowly from the vestry door towards the altar with uplifted eyes, holding in one hand a book, in the other a rosary. Zbyszko saw the lily-like face, the blue eyes, and the angelic features full of peace, tenderness, and mercy, and his heart began to throb with emotion. He knew that according to God's command it was his duty to love his King and Queen, and he did so in his own fashion; but now his heart overflowed with a great love, which did not come by command, but burst forth like a flame; it was filled, moreover, with a profound feeling of worship and humility, and with a desire for self-sacrifice. The young wloDYka was impetuous; now, therefore, he was instantly seized with a desire to show in some way the devotion and steadfastness of a knight on the Queen's behalf, to accomplish some deed for her, to ride forth and conquer some one, and risk his own life for all.

"I had better go with Kniaz Witold," he said to

himself, "for how can I serve the saintly lady if there is no war here?"

He did not pause to think that one can serve in other ways as well as with sword, or spear, or axe; he was ready to attack alone the whole power of Timur the Lame. He longed to leap on his charger as soon as mass was done, and do something. But what? He did not know himself. He only knew that his hands trembled and burned, that his whole soul was on fire.

He forgot the danger that threatened him. He even forgot Danusia, and when he remembered her, through hearing the children singing in the church, he felt that this love was something different. He had promised Danusia fidelity; he had promised her the conquest of three Germans, and his promise he would keep. But the Queen was above all other women. While thinking how many men he would fain kill for her, he had visions of countless suits of armour, helmets, ostrich feathers, peacock plumes; yet these were not enough to satisfy his martial ardour.

He regarded her fixedly, pondering with overflowing heart how he might honour her by prayer, for he thought that one could not make an ordinary prayer for a queen. He could say, "Pater noster, qui es in coelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum," for a certain Franciscan monk had taught him this much in Wilno. It may be that the Franciscan himself did not know more, or it may be that Zbyszko had forgotten, but it is certain that he could not recite the whole Paternoster. But now he began to repeat the few words he knew, and in his soul he gave them this meaning: "Give our beloved lady good health, long life and great happiness, and watch over her more than over any other."

No more sincere prayer was uttered in the church that day, for it was said by one who knew that his life was already forfeit to the law.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER mass, Zbyszko thought that if he could but fall upon his knees before the Queen and kiss her feet, he would not care what might happen afterwards. But after the first mass, the Queen went to her apartments. Usually, she took no nourishment until noon, and she was not present at the festive breakfast, during which jugglers and fools appeared for the amusement of the King. The old Wlodyka of Dlugolas now came and summoned Zbyszko to the Princess.

"You will serve Danusia and myself at table as my courtier," said the Princess. "It may happen that you will please the King by some facetious word or deed, and the Knight of the Cross, if he recognise you, will not complain to the King, seeing that you serve me at the King's table."

Zbyszko kissed the Princess's hand. Then he turned to Danusia. Although more accustomed to battles than to the manners of a Court, he plainly knew what was befitting a knight when he beholds the lady of his thoughts in the morning, for he drew back, and, assuming an expression of surprise and making the sign of the cross, exclaimed:

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!"

"Why do you make the sign of the cross, Zbyszko, seeing that mass is over?" asked Danusia, looking at him with her blue eyes.

"Because your beauty has increased so much since last night that I am astonished!"

Mikolaj of Dlugolas, who did not like the new foreign customs of chivalry, shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Lose no time talking to her of her beauty! She is only a shrub that has hardly yet grown out of the ground."

At this, Zbyszko looked at him rancorously.

"Have a care about calling her a shrub," said he, turning pale with anger. "Were you but younger, I would instantly challenge you, and would fight until one of us were slain!"

"Be silent, beardless boy! I can manage you even to-day."

"Be silent," said the Princess. "Instead of thinking of the danger threatening you, you seek only to quarrel! I should prefer to have a more steadfast knight for Danusia. If you wish to froth, go where you please; we do not need you here."

Zbyszko felt abashed at the Princess's words, and began to beg forgiveness. But he resolved that, if Pan Mikolaj of Dlugolas had a grown son, he would one day challenge him; assuredly, he could not forgive Mikolaj for calling Danusia a shrub. However, he determined to remain quiet while in the King's castle, and not to provoke anyone, unless in the case of absolute necessity.

The blowing of horns announced that breakfast was ready, and the Princess Anna, taking Danusia by the hand, went to the King's apartments, where the lay dignitaries and the knights stood awaiting her arrival. Princess Ziemowita, being the King's sister, entered first. Soon the hall was filled with guests, dignitaries, and knights. The King was seated at the upper end of the table, having near him Wojciech Jastrzembiel, Bishop of Krakow. The Bishop, although inferior in rank to the others wearing mitres, was seated at the right hand of the King, for he was the Pope's envoy. The two Princesses took the next places. Near Anna Danuta, Jan, the former Archbishop of Gniezno, was comfortably seated in a large chair. Zbyszko had heard of him at the Court of Prince Witold, and now, standing behind the Princess and Danusia, he recognised the Archbishop by his abundant hair, which, being curled, made his head look like a "kropidlo," or sprinkling-brush of shavings. At the Courts of the Polish princes, he was always called "Kropidlo," for this reason; and the Knights of the Cross further gave him the name of "Grapidla." He was noted for his gaiety and the lightness of his manners. Having been nominated to the Archbishopric of Gniezno against the wishes of the King, he took possession of it by armed force, and for this act he was deprived of his rank. He then joined the Knights of the Cross, who gave him the

barren Bishopric of Kamieniec in Pomerania. Thereupon he concluded that it was better to be friendly with the mighty King, and, craving his pardon, he returned to his own country, and was now awaiting a vacancy, in the hope of being permitted to fill it by the kind-hearted sovereign. As the future proved, this hope was not misplaced. In the meantime, he was trying to win back the King's heart by his gay and sportive demeanour. But he still favoured the Knights of the Cross. Even now at the Court of Jagiello, where he was not very warmly received by the dignitaries and knights, he sought the Knight of Lichtenstein's company, and gladly sat by him at table.

Zbyszko, standing behind the Princess's chair, was near to Lichtenstein that he might have touched him with his hand. His fingers, indeed, began to twitch, but he overcame his impetuosity, and did not permit himself to entertain any evil thoughts. He could not, however, refrain from looking eagerly at Lichtenstein's head and shoulders, and trying to decide whether he would have a hard fight with him if they should meet either during the war or in single combat. He concluded that it would be no difficult task to conquer the German. The Knight's shoulders, indeed, appeared massive beneath the green broad-cloth of his dress, but, nevertheless, he was only a weakling compared with many of the knights who sat at the King's table. At these Zbyszko looked with admiration and envy. But his attention was now attracted by the actions of the King, who, at this moment, gathered his hair with his fingers and pushed it behind his ear as if impatient that the breakfast was not served. For a moment his eyes rested on Zbyszko, and at this the young knight felt not a little apprehensive lest he should be obliged to face the anger of the King. This was the first time he had thought seriously of the consequences of his adventure.

The German knight did not know that the youth who had attacked him so boldly on the highway was now so near. The breakfast began. Meanwhile, Ciaruszek, the fool, sitting on a chair by the doorway, began to imitate the singing of a nightingale, of which the King was very fond. Then another jester made the round of the table, stopping behind the guests to imitate the buzzing of a bee, which he did so well that some of them began to

defend their heads from attack. Seeing this, the others burst into laughter. Zbyszko had served the Princess and Danusia diligently; but when Lichtenstein began to clap his bald head, he again forgot his danger, and laughed. Jamont, a young Lithuanian prince, who was standing beside him, also laughed very heartily. The knight having at length found out his mistake, put his hand in his pocket, and, turning towards Bishop Kropidlo, spoke a few words in German. The Bishop immediately repeated them in Polish.

"The noble lord," he said, turning towards the fool, "will give you two marks; only do not buzz too near, for, though one drives away bees, the drones are killed."

The fool took the two marks given him by the knight, and, taking advantage of the licence granted to fools at all courts, answered:

"There is plenty of honey in the province of Dobrzyn*; that is why it is beset with the drones. Drive them off, King Wladyslaw!"

"Here is a penny from me, because you have said a clever thing," said Kropidlo; "but remember that those drones from Marienburg by which Dobrzyn is beset have stings, and it is dangerous to climb the trees to the beehives."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Zyndram of Maszkow, the sword-bearer of Krakow, "one can smoke them out!"

"With what?"

"With powder."

"Or cut down the beehives with an axe," added the gigantic Paszko Zlodziej of Biskupice.

Then Zbyszko's heart leaped with joy, for such words, he thought, must betoken war. Kuno von Lichtenstein understood what was said, for, during his long sojourn in Torun and Chelmno, he had learned the Polish tongue, although he was too proud to use it. But now, irritated by the words of Zyndram of Maszkow, he looked sharply at him with his grey eyes.

"We shall see," he said.

"As our fathers saw at Plowce† and at Wilno," answered Zyndram.

"Pax vobiscum!" exclaimed Kropidlo. "Pax, pax! If

* Unlawfully seized by the Knights of the Cross.

† In this battle the Knights of the Cross were defeated.

only Mikolaj of Kurow will give up his Kujawian bishopric, and his Majesty will but graciously appoint me in his place, I will preach you so beautiful a sermon on love between Christian nations, that you will all sincerely repent. Hatred is nothing but 'ignis,' and 'ignis infernalis' at that; so dreadful a fire that one cannot extinguish it with water, but must pour wine upon it. Give us some wine! We will pass to dissipation, as the late Bishop Zawisza of Kurozwenki used to say. Give us some wine, and may love blossom among Christians!"

"Among true Christians," added Kuno von Lichtenstein with emphasis.

"What?" exclaimed the Bishop Wysz of Krakow, raising his head; "are you not now in an ancient Christian kingdom? Are not our churches older than yours in Marienburg?"

"As for that, I do not know," returned the Knight.

The King was especially sensitive when any question touching Christianity arose. To him it seemed that the Knight had meant to make an allusion to himself; therefore his cheeks flushed suddenly and his eyes began to sparkle.

"What!" he roared in a deep voice, "am not I a Christian king?"

"Sire, the kingdom calls itself Christian," coolly answered the Knight, "but its customs are pagan."

At this arose many angry knights, all powerful and famous, victors in many battles and tournaments. Alternately red and pale with wrath, and gnashing their teeth, they cried:

"Woe to us! The fellow is a guest, and we cannot challenge him!"

Zawisza Czarny Sulimczyk, the most famous among the famous, "the exemplar of knighthood," as he was called, turned to Lichtenstein, with a frown upon his brow.

"I do not acknowledge you, Kuno," he said. "How can you, a knight, insult a mighty nation, knowing that, as an envoy, you cannot be punished for it?"

But Kuno calmly bore the threatening look.

"Our Order," he answered slowly and precisely, "before it came to Prussia, fought in Palestine; even there the Saracens respected envoys. But in your country you do not respect them; and for this reason I have called your customs pagan."

At these words the uproar increased. Round the table again were heard shouts of "Woe! Woe!"

But the shouts subsided when the King, who was now furious, clapped his hands in Lithuanian fashion. Then the venerable Jasko Topor of Tenczyn, the castellan of Krakow, who was dreaded because of the importance of his office, arose and said gravely:

"Noble knight of Lichtenstein, if you, an envoy, have been insulted, speak, and severe punishment will speedily be meted out."

"Such a thing would have happened in no other Christian country," answered Kuno. "Yesterday, on the road to Tyniec, I was attacked by one of your knights, and although he might very easily have recognised by the cross on my mantle who I was, he made an attempt upon my life."

Zbyszko, on hearing these words, became very pale, and glanced involuntarily at the King, whose anger was terrible.

"Can this be possible?" said Jasko of Tenczyn in surprise.

"Ask the Pan of Taczew, who was a witness of the incident," answered the envoy.

All eyes now turned towards Powala, who stood gloomily for a while, and with lowered eyes.

"Yes," he said at length, "it is so!"

"Shame! Shame!" shouted all the knights on hearing this. "Let the earth devour such a man!"

To mark their sense of the outrage, some of them began to beat their breasts, while others, not knowing what to do, struck the silver dishes.

"Why did you not kill him?" cried the King.

"Because his head belongs to the Court," answered Powala.

"Have you thrown him into prison?" asked Topor of Tenczyn the castellan.

"No. He is a wloodyka, and swore upon his knightly honour that he would again appear."

"But he will not appear!" exclaimed Kuno ironically, raising his head.

At that moment a youthful voice sounded behind the Knight.

"I did it!" Zbyszko exclaimed. "I, Zbyszko of Bogdaniec!"

At these words the knights made a sudden rush towards the unhappy Zbyszko, but they were stopped by a threatening gesture from the King, whose voice roared with rage, like the rumbling of carriage-wheels rolling over stones.

"Cut off his head! Cut off his head! Let the Knight send it to Marienburg to the Grand Master!"

"Seize him, Jamont!" he cried to the young Lithuanian prince standing near.

The terrified Jamont laid his trembling hands on Zbyszko's shoulders. But the white-bearded castellan of Krakow, Topor of Tenczyn, raised his hand as a sign that he desired to speak.

"Gracious King," he said, when all were silent, "let this Komthur be assured that not only your Majesty's righteous anger, but our laws, will punish with death anyone who insults an envoy. Otherwise, he may well think that there are no Christian laws in this country. To-morrow I will judge the offender."

The last words he said calmly, and as if no one could challenge his decision. Then, turning to Jamont, he said:

"Confine him in the tower. As for you, Pan of Taczew, you will be a witness."

"I will speak to the offence committed by the lad," answered Powala, looking at Lichtenstein.

"He is right!" immediately said some knights. "He is only a boy. Why should the shame be put upon us all?"

There was a moment of silence, and angry looks were cast at the Knight. Meanwhile, Jamont conducted Zbyszko to the courtyard of the castle, and there entrusted him to the archers. In his young heart, Jamont pitied the prisoner, and this pity was increased by a natural hatred of all Germans. Nevertheless, he was a Lithuanian, and accustomed to fulfil blindly all the commands of the Grand Duke.

"Do you know what I should do if I were in your place?" he whispered to the young prisoner with kindly persuasion, being himself afraid of the King's wrath. "I should hang myself! It would, indeed, be best. The King is very angry, and they will cut off your head. Why should you not make him glad? Hang yourself, friend. Such is the custom of this country."

"Hang myself!" exclaimed the young wlodyka, who had not immediately understood these words. "They have baptized you, but your heathen skin is still on you."

Do you not know that it is a sin for a Christian to kill himself?"

The Prince shrugged his shoulders.

"It is, or it is not, according to the motive. And they will cut off your head just the same."

These words angered Zbyszko, and he wondered whether it would not be fitting to challenge the Prince to fight either on horseback or on foot, with swords or with axes; but he instantly stifled his desire. He bent his head, and, surrounded by the archers, silently entered the tower.

Meanwhile, the attention of all in the dining-hall was directed to Danusia, who had turned pale through fear. At first, she stood motionless, like a wax figure in some church, but when she heard that they would execute Zbyszko, she was seized with an overwhelming grief; her mouth quivered, and she began to cry so piteously that all faces were turned towards her, and the King himself asked:

"What is the matter?"

"Gracious King!" answered the Princess Anna, "she is the daughter of Jurand of Spychow, and this unhappy knight had made a vow to her. He had vowed to tear three peacock plumes from the helmets of the Germans, and having observed such a crest on the helmet of this Komthur, he imagined that God Himself had sent him the Knight of the Cross. He did not attack him, my lord, in malice, but in foolishness. Be merciful, therefore, and do not punish him—we beseech you on our knees!"

Having said this, she arose, and taking Danusia by the hand, hastened with her towards the King, who, seeing this, began to retire. But both kneeled before him, and Danusia cried:

"Forgive Zbyszko, most gracious King, forgive Zbyszko!"

Then, moved by fear, she hid her fair head in the folds of the King's robe, kissed his knees, and trembled like a leaf. Anna Ziemowitowa kneeled on the other side, and clasping her hands, looked at the King, on whose face great perplexity was visible. He retired towards the chair, but did not repulse Danusia.

"Do not trouble me!" he cried, waving his hands. "The youth is guilty. He has brought disgrace on the whole country. He must be executed!"

But the girl's hands clung closer and closer to his knees.

"Forgive Zbyszko, gracious King, forgive Zbyszko!" the child still cried more and more pitifully.

"Jurand of Spychow is a famous knight, and a cause of awe unto the Germans!" the voices of some among the knights were now heard to exclaim.

"And the youth fought bravely at Wilno!" added Powala.

But the King, though he pitied Danusia, excused himself further.

"He is not guilty towards me," he declared, "and it is not I who may forgive him. Let the envoy of the Order be the first to pardon him, then will I pardon him also; but if the envoy refuse, then he must die."

"Forgive him, sir!" exclaimed both of the Princesses.

"Forgive, forgive!" repeated the voices of the knights.

Kuno closed his eyes, and sat with uplifted head, as if delighting to see the Princesses and such famous knights entreating him. But his expression soon changed; he bowed his head, crossed his hands over his breast, and, from being a proud man, assumed the air of a humble one.

"Christ, our Saviour," he said in a soft, mild voice, "forgave His enemies, and even the malefactor on the Cross."

"Here, indeed, is a true knight!" said Bishop Wysz.

"He is, he is!" exclaimed the knights.

"How can I refuse to forgive," continued Kuno, "being not only a Christian, but also a monk? I therefore forgive him, with all my heart, as a servant and friar of Christ."

"Honour to him!" cried Powala of Taczew.

"Honour, honour!" repeated all the others.

"But," continued the Knight, "I am come here among you as an envoy, and I carry in my person the majesty of my whole Order, which is Christ's Order. Whosoever offends me, therefore, offends the Order; and whosoever offends the Order offends Christ Himself. And so grievous an offence, I, in the presence of God and the people, have no power to forgive. If your law does not punish this wrong, then let it be known unto all Christian lords!"

There was profound silence at these words. After a time, there was heard only the gnashing of teeth, the heavy breathings of the knights' suppressed wrath, and the sobbing of Danusia.

When evening had come, all hearts were in sympathy with Zbyszko. Those very knights who had been ready in the morning to cut him in pieces, were now considering how they might best help him. The Princesses determined to see the Queen, and to beseech her to prevail upon Lichtenstein to withdraw his complaint, or, if necessary, to write to the Grand Master of the Order, asking him to command Kuno to abandon the plaint. This seemed to her to be the best plan, inasmuch as Jadwiga was held in such unusual respect that, should the Grand Master refuse to grant her request, it would anger the Pope and all the Christian lords. But he was not likely to refuse, for Konrad von Jungingen was a peaceable man. Unfortunately, Bishop Wysz of Krakow, who was also the Queen's physician, forbade them to say even a word about the affair to the Queen.

"She can never bear to hear of death sentences," he said, "and she takes even the matter of a mere robber's death too seriously; she would be much more troubled were she to hear that this young noble has hope of obtaining mercy through her. Any such anxiety would make her seriously ill, and her health is of more worth to the whole kingdom than are ten knightly heads."

He concluded by saying, moreover, that if anyone should dare, notwithstanding what he had said, to disturb the Queen, on that person he himself would cause the King's anger to fall, and would have him excommunicated besides.

Both Princesses were frightened at so strong a menace, and determined to be silent before the Queen, but to beseech the King until he showed mercy. The whole Court and all the knights sympathised with Zbyszko. Powala of Taczew declared that he would not refrain from telling the whole truth; but that, at the same time, he would also speak in favour of the youth, for the whole affair was only an instance of youthful impetuosity. Notwithstanding this, all were aware, as, indeed, the castellan, Jasko of Tenczyn, had declared, that if the Knight of the Cross proved unrelenting, the severe penalty of the law must be executed.

For this reason, the knights were the more indignant against Lichtenstein. They thought, and even said frankly. "He is an envoy, and cannot be called into the lists; but when he returns to Marienburg, God will not

permit him to die a natural death." Nor were the talking idly, for a belted knight was not permitted to utter a single unmeaning word, and the knight who vowed anything was bound either to accomplish his vow or perish in the attempt. Powala was the more implacably angry, because he had a beloved daughter of Danusia's age in Taczew, and the sight of the girl's tears made his rough heart tender.

That same day, therefore, he visited Zbyszko in his underground cell, recommended him to have hope, and told him concerning the prayers of the Princesses, and also of Danusia's tears. When Zbyszko learned how the damsel had thrown herself on his behalf at the King's feet, he was moved to tears, and longed to express his gratitude.

"Ah!" he said, wiping his eyes with his hand, "may God bless her, and permit that I may soon be at liberty to engage again in combat for her sake, either on horseback or on foot. I did not promise her Germans enough! To such a lady I should have vowed as many Germans as she herself has years. If the Lord Jesus will but release me from this tower, I will not deal niggardly with her!" And he raised his eyes, full of gratitude.

"Better first promise some gift to the Church," advised the Pan of Taczew. "If your promise be pleasing, you will surely soon be free. Now, listen! Your uncle has seen Lichtenstein, and I will go to him also. It can be no shame for you to ask his pardon, since you are in the wrong; and then it is not of Lichtenstein, but of an envoy, that you crave pardon. Are you ready?"

"When such a knight as your Grace tells me it is fitting," answered Zbyszko, "I will do so. But if he should require me to ask pardon in the same fashion as he asked us on the road from Tyniec, then they may rather cut off my head. My uncle will remain, and he will be my avenger when the envoy's mission is at an end."

"We must first hear what he says to Macko," answered Powala.

Macko had indeed been to see the German; but he returned from him as gloomy as the night itself, and went directly to the King, to whom he was presented by the castellan. The King, now quite appeased, received Macko kindly, and when the knight kneeled before him he

immediately bade the suppliant arise, asking what he desired.

"Gracious lord," said Macko, "where there has been offence there must also be punishment, otherwise there would be no law in the world. But in this offence I also am guilty, for I did not try to restrain the natural impetuosity of the youth, my nephew. I even praised him for it. It is my fault, gracious King, seeing that I have often said to him: 'Cut first, then look to see whom you have hurt.' But what is right in war is wrong at Court! My kinsman, Sire, is a man as pure as gold, and the last of our house."

"He has brought shame upon me and upon my kingdom," said the King. "Shall I then be gracious to him for that?"

Macko was silent, for the thought of Zbyszko overpowered him with grief.

"I did not know before that I loved him so well," he said in a broken voice, after a long silence. "I only know it now that misfortune has come. I am old, and he is the last of our house. If he perish, we perish with him. Merciful lord and King, have pity upon our family!"

Here Macko kneeled again, stretching out his arms, wasted with war.

"We defended Wilno," he said at last, with tears. "God granted us honest booty. To whom now shall I bequeath it? If the Knight demands a sentence, it must be done. Only permit me to be the one to suffer it. What is life to me without Zbyszko? He is still young; let him redeem the land and beget children, as God has ordered men to do. The Knight will not inquire whose was the head that was cut off. There need be no shame upon our family. It is hard for a man to die; but it is better that one man perish than that a family should be utterly destroyed."

Thus speaking, he embraced the King's knees, while the King himself was forced to blink his eyes rapidly, which, with him, was a sign of emotion.

"It cannot be," he said at length. "I cannot condemn to death a belted knight. It cannot be! It cannot be!"

"And, besides, it would be an injustice," added the castellan. "The law must crush the guilty, but the law is not a monster which looks not to see whose blood is shed. And you must think what shame would come upon your family," he continued, addressing Macko, "if your nephew

consented to your proposal. It would be considered a disgrace, not only to him, but to his children also."

"He would not consent," Macko replied; "but if it were done without his knowledge, he would avenge me, even as I, if I live, have sworn to avenge him."

"Ha!" said Jasko of Tenczyn, "persuade the Knight of the Cross to withdraw the complaint."

"I have asked him," said Macko.

"And what," asked the King, raising his head, "what did he say?"

"His only answer was: 'You ought to have asked for pardon on the road to Tyniec. Then you would not, and I will not now.'"

"And why did not you do so upon the road?" said the King.

"Because he required us to dismount and ask his pardon on foot."

The King threw back his hair behind his ears, and began to say something, when a courtier entered to announce that the Knight of Lichtenstein begged for an audience.

On hearing this, Jagiello looked first at Jasko of Tenczyn, then at Macko. He ordered them to remain, with the hope, perhaps, that he might take advantage of this opportunity and, by using his knightly authority, bring the affair to an end. Meanwhile, the Knight had entered, and was bowing before the King.

"Gracious lord," said Lichtenstein, "here is a written complaint touching the insult I have suffered in your kingdom."

"Address your complaint to him," answered the King, pointing towards Jasko of Tenczyn.

"I know neither your laws nor your Courts," answered the Knight, looking directly into the King's face. "I only know that an envoy of the Order can complain only to the King."

Jagiello's small eyes flashed with impatience. He stretched out his hand, however, and accepted the parchment, which he handed at once to Jasko of Tenczyn. The castellan unfolded it and began to read; but the further he read the more perplexed and sad his face became.

"Sir," said he at last, "you seek the life of this lad, as though he were a danger to the whole of your Order. Is it possible that the Knights of the Cross can be afraid even of children?"

"The Knights of the Cross fear no one," answered the Komthur proudly.

"Especially God," added the old castellan.

Next day, before the Court of the castellan, Powala of Taczew testified to everything that could mitigate the nature of Zbyszko's offence. But in vain did he attribute the deed to youthfulness and lack of experience; in vain did he declare that many an older man, had he made the same vow, and prayed for its fulfilment, and then suddenly perceived in front of him such a crest, might also have thought it the work of God's providence. But there was one thing that the worthy knight could not deny—that, had it not been for him, Zbyszko's spear would have pierced Lichtenstein's breast. Kuno had brought into Court the same armour which he had worn that day. It appeared to be so thin that Zbyszko, with his great strength, would have pierced it through and killed the envoy had not Powala of Taczew prevented him. Zbyszko was then asked if he intended to kill the Knight of the Cross, and he could not deny it.

"I warned him from afar," said he, "to point his lance; and had he shouted in reply that he was an envoy, I should not have attacked him."

These words greatly pleased the knights, who, out of sympathy for the lad, were present in great numbers.

"True! Why did he not reply?" many voices were immediately heard to say.

But the castellan's face remained severe and gloomy. Ordering those present to be silent, he meditated for a while, and then looked sharply at Zbyszko.

"Can you swear, by the Passion of our Lord," he asked, "that you saw neither the mantle nor the cross?"

"No," answered Zbyszko, "I cannot. Had I not seen the cross, I should have thought he was one of our knights, and I would not have attacked one of them."

"And how was it possible to find any Knight of the Cross near Krakow, except an envoy, or one of his retinue?"

To this Zbyszko did not reply, for there was nothing to be said. It was clear to all that, if the Pan of Taczew had not interposed, they would at that moment have had before them not the armour of the envoy, but the envoy himself, with pierced breast—an eternal disgrace to the Polish

nation. Even those, therefore, who sympathised with Zbyszko with all their souls, well understood that he could not expect a mild sentence. After a time, indeed, the castellan himself said:

"As you did not stop to think whom you were attacking, and you did it without anger, therefore our Saviour will forgive you. But you had better commit yourself to the Most Holy Lady, for the law cannot condone your offence."

Upon hearing this, Zbyszko, although he expected some such words, turned somewhat pale. But presently he shook his long hair.

"It is God's will," he said, making the sign of the cross. "I cannot help it!"

Then he turned to Macko and looked significantly towards Lichtenstein, as if recommending him to his kinsman's memory. His uncle expressed by an answering nod that he had understood and would remember. Lichtenstein also understood the look and the nod, and, though he was as courageous in fight as he was implacable in hate, a cold shiver ran through him, so terrible and ill-omened was the face of the old warrior. Between himself and that knight, the Knight of the Cross well knew, it would henceforth be a question of life or death. He knew that even had he desired to avoid the combat, he could not do so, and that, when his mission was ended, they should meet at Marienburg.

The castellan, meanwhile, went to the adjoining room to dictate the sentence to his secretary. During this interruption, some of the knights approached the German.

"May you receive a more merciful sentence from your Judge on the great Day of Judgment!" said they to him in their anger.

Lichtenstein, however, cared only for the opinion of Zawisza, who was noted all over the world for his knightly deeds, his knowledge of the laws of chivalry, and his great exactness in keeping them. In the most entangled affairs in which any question of knightly honour was involved, men came to him even from distant lands, and no one had ever disputed his decisions.

Lichtenstein, therefore, approached this knight as if seeking to justify himself for his deadly grudge.

"The Grand Master himself, with the chapter, might show him clemency," said he, "but I cannot."

"Your Grand Master has nothing to do with our laws; only our King can show clemency to our people, not he," answered Zawisza.

"I, as his envoy, was forced to insist upon punishment."

"You were first a knight, Lichtenstein," he replied gravely, "and afterwards an envoy!"

"You think, then, that I have acted against honour?"

"Do you not know our books of chivalry? Do you not know that they order us to imitate at once two animals, the lamb and the lion? Which one of the two have you imitated in this case?"

"You are not my judge!"

"You asked me if you had committed an offence, and I have answered as I think."

"Yours is a hard answer," returned Lichtenstein, "and one which I cannot swallow."

"Your own malice, and not mine, will choke you."

"But Christ will put it to my account, that I cared more for the dignity of the Order than for your praise."

"Christ will judge us all."

Further conversation was interrupted by the re-appearance of the castellan and the secretary. Every one waited in silence, for all knew that the sentence would be a severe one. The castellan sat at the table, and, having taken a Crucifix in his hand, ordered Zbyszko to kneel.

The secretary then began to read the sentence in Latin. It was the sentence of death. "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" said Zbyszko, when the reading was over, striking himself several times on the breast.

He then arose and threw himself into the arms of Macko, who kissed his head and his eyes.

In the evening of the same day, at the four corners of the market-place, a herald announced with the sound of trumpets to the knights, guests, and burghers assembled, that the noble Zbyszko of Bogdaniec was sentenced by the Castellan's Court to be beheaded by the sword.

Macko, however, succeeded in obtaining a delay of the execution; this was readily granted, because in those days prisoners were allowed ample time to dispose of their property, and to reconcile their souls to God. Even Lichtenstein himself had no wish to insist upon the early execution of the sentence, for he knew that, so long as he obtained satisfaction for the offended majesty of the Order,

it would be impolitic to estrange the powerful monarch to whom he had been sent, not only to take part in the solemnities of the christening, but also to conduct negotiations concerning the province of Dobrzyn. But the chief reason for the delay was the Queen's health. Bishop Wysz was anxious that the execution should not take place before her delivery, rightly thinking that it would be difficult to conceal such an affair from the Queen. She would assuredly feel such sorrow and distress as would be very injurious to her health. For these reasons they granted Zbyszko several weeks of life in which to make his final arrangements and to bid his friends farewell.

Macko visited him daily, and sought to console him. They spoke sorrowfully of Zbyszko's inevitable death, and still more sorrowfully of the extinction of the family.

"It cannot be otherwise, unless you marry," said Zbyszko on one occasion.

"I should prefer to discover some distant relative," answered the sorrowful Macko. "How can I be thinking of women when you are to be beheaded? Even if I am obliged to marry, I shall not do so until I have sent a knightly challenge to Lichtenstein, and have avenged your death. Do not fear!"

"God will reward you; I have at least that joy, for I know that you will not forgive him. But how shall you avenge me?"

"When his duties as envoy are at an end, there may yet be war! If there be war, I will challenge him to single combat before the battle."

"On levelled ground?"

"On levelled ground, on horseback or on foot; but only to the death, not to captivity. If there be peace, I will go to Marienburg and strike the door of the castle gates with my spear, and order a trumpeter to proclaim that I challenge Kuno to fight to the death. He cannot avoid the contest!"

"Surely he cannot refuse. And you will vanquish him."

"Vanquish! I could not defeat Zawisza, Paszko, or Powala; but, without boasting, I can take care of two like him. That scoundrel knight shall see! The Frisian knight, was not he stronger? Yet I hacked him through the helm until the axe stopped! Did I not?"

Zbyszko breathed a sigh of relief.

"I have some consolation, even in death!" he said.

"You must not break down with sorrow," returned the old nobleman with emotion. "Your bones will not need to search for one another at the Day of Judgment. I have ordered an honest coffin of oaken planks for you. You shall not perish like a peasant, either. Nor shall I be miserly with prayers. Do not fear!"

Zbyszko's heart rejoiced, and, bending towards his uncle's hand, he repeated:

"God will reward you!"

Sometimes, however, notwithstanding all these consolations, he was seized with a dreadful sense of loneliness. Once when Macko came to see him, when he had welcomed his kinsman, he looked through the grating in the wall.

"How is it outside?" he asked.

"Beautiful weather, like gold," said Macko, "and the sun warms one so that all the world is glad."

"Ah! Mighty God!" said Zbyszko, on hearing this, and he raised his hands to his neck, and threw back his head; "to have a horse, and ride across the broad fields! It is terrible for a young man to perish! It is terrible!"

"Men may perish on horseback," answered Macko.

"Pshaw! But how many they may slay first!"

He inquired concerning many of the knights whom he had seen at the King's Court, and how they passed the day. He longed with all his heart and soul to be with them, and when he learned that Zawisza, immediately after the christening, purposed going beyond Hungary against the Turks, he could not refrain from exclaiming:

"If they would but let me go! It would be better to perish among the pagans!"

This, however, could not be. But in the meanwhile something had happened. Neither of the Mazovian Princesses had ceased to think about Zbyszko. The Princess Alexandra Ziemowitowa at length decided to send a letter to the Grand Master. It was true that the Grand Master could not alter the sentence pronounced by the castellan, but he could intercede with the King in favour of the youth. It was not right for Jagiello to show any clemency, for the offence was an attempt on the life of an envoy; but if the Grand Master besought the King, the King might then pardon the lad. Thus hope entered the hearts of both Princesses. Princess Alexandra, being well disposed towards the polished monk-knights, was a

great favourite with them. They often sent her rich presents from Marienburg, and letters in which the Master called her the venerable, pious benefactress, and protectress of the Order. Her words might do much; it was probable that her wishes might not be denied. It was now necessary to find a messenger zealous enough to carry the letter as quickly as possible and return immediately with the answer. Hearing this, old Macko determined to carry it himself.

The castellan again promised to delay the execution. Full of hope, Macko began that same day to prepare for his journey. Then he went to see Zbyszko, and told him the good news. At first Zbyszko was filled with great joy, as if they had already opened the door of the tower for him to go free. But afterwards he again became thoughtful and gloomy.

"Who can expect anything from the Germans?" he said. "Lichtenstein might also ask the King for clemency, and he might get some benefit from so doing, for he would thus avoid your vengeance; but he will do nothing."

"He is angry because we would not ask his pardon on the road to Tyniec. People speak well, though, of Konrad, the Grand Master. At any rate, you will lose nothing by it."

"Assuredly," said Zbyszko, "but do not bow too low before him."

"I will not. I am going with the letter from Princess Alexandra; that is all."

"Well, since you are so kind, may God help you!"

Suddenly he looked sharply at his uncle.

"But if the King pardon me," he said, "Lichtenstein shall be mine, not yours. Remember!"

"You are not sure about your neck, therefore do not make any promises. You have made enough of those foolish vows!" said the old man angrily.

They then threw themselves into each others' arms. Zbyszko remained alone. Hope and uncertainty alternately tossed his soul; but when night came, and with it a storm, then Zbyszko, his spirit plunged in gloom, again lost confidence, and all night he could not close his eyes.

"I shall not escape death," he thought; "nothing now can save me!"

But next day, the worthy Princess Anna Januszowna

came to see him, bringing also Danusia, who wore her little lute at her belt. Zbyszko fell at their feet; then, although he was in great distress, he did not forget his duty as a knight, and expressed his surprise at Danusia's beauty. But the Princess looked at him sadly.

"You must not wonder at her," she said, "for if Macko does not return with a favourable answer, or if he should not return at all, you will have to wonder at even better things in Heaven!"

Then she began to weep, and Danusia wept also. Zbyszko again kneeled at their feet, and, in the presence of their grief, his heart grew soft like heated wax. He did not love Danusia as a man loves a woman; but he felt that he loved her dearly. The sight of her had such an effect on him that he became another man, less severe, less impetuous, less warlike. At length, a great sorrow filled him, because he must leave her before he could accomplish his vow.

"Poor child," he said, "I cannot lay at your feet those peacock plumes; but when I stand in the presence of God I will say, 'Lord, forgive my sins, and give to Panna Jurandowna of Spychow all riches on earth.'"

"You met but a short time ago," said the Princess. "God will not grant it!"

Zbyszko began to recollect the incident which occurred in Tyniec, and his heart again melted. He asked Danusia to sing to him the song she was singing when he caught her from the falling bench and carried her to the Princess. Danusia, although in no mood for singing, raised her eyes, and began:

My heart is heavy for lack of thee,
 Of thee, my love! O my love!
 To thee I'd fly over land and sea,
 Were I but a bird, my love!
 I'd sit and sing in a leafy tree,
 Near thee, my love! O my love!
 I'd sing and ask thee to look on me,
 On thee, O my love! My love!

And suddenly tears began to flow down her face, and she could not sing another word. Zbyszko seized her in his arms, as he had done in the inn at Tyniec, and began to walk with her round the room.

"If God release me from this prison," he said in an ecstasy of tenderness, "when you grow up I will take you for my wife, if only your father will give his consent."

Danusia embraced him, and hid her face on his shoulder. His grief grew every moment, and, flowing from a simple Slav nature, it was transformed in his honest soul almost to a rustic song :

Thou art mine, my love !
Thou art mine !

CHAPTER VI.

AN event now happened, compared with which all other affairs sank into insignificance. Towards the evening of the twenty-first of June, the news of the Queen's sudden illness spread throughout the castle. Bishop Wysz and the other physicians remained in her room the whole night. It was known that premature confinement threatened the Queen. The castellan of Krakow, Jasko Topor of Tenczyn, sent a messenger to the absent King that same night. On the following day the news spread throughout the entire city and its environs. It was Sunday, and the churches were crowded. All doubt was soon set at rest. After mass, the guests and the knights who had come to be present at the festivals, the nobles and the burghers, went to the castle. The guilds and other fraternities came out with their banners. From noontide onwards a numberless crowd of people surrounded the Wawel, but order was kept by the King's archers. The city was almost deserted; crowds of peasants moved towards the castle to obtain news of the health of their beloved Queen. At length the bishops and the castellan appeared at the principal gate, and with them the canons, King's counsellors, and knights. They mingled with the people, telling them the news, but forbidding any loud manifestation of joy, lest it should be injurious to the sick Queen. They announced to all that the Queen had been delivered of a daughter. This news filled the hearts of all with joy, especially when they learned that, although the confinement was premature, there was now no danger, either for mother or child. The crowds began to disperse, for, although it was forbidden to shout near the castle every one wished to manifest his joy. The streets of the city, therefore, were speedily filled with people, and songs and cries of exultation resounded at every corner. Nor were they disappointed that a girl had been born. Was it

unfortunate, men asked, that King Louis had no sons, and that Jadwiga became their Queen. By her marriage with Jagiello, the strength of the kingdom had been doubled. The same would happen again. Where could one find a richer heiress than their Queen? Neither the Roman Emperor nor any other monarch enjoyed such dominion, or possessed so numerous a knighthood. There would be great competition among the monarchs for her hand; the most powerful of them would bow to their King and Queen; they would come to Krakow, and the merchants would profit by it; and new domains, perhaps Bohemian or Hungarian, would be added to the kingdom.

Thus spoke the merchants among themselves, and their joy increased at every moment. They feasted in the private houses and in the inns. The market-place was full of lanterns and torches. The bustle and animation throughout the streets of the city continued almost until daybreak.

In the morning, there was further news from the castle. It was made known that the Bishop Peter had baptized the child during the night. For this reason it was feared that the infant girl could not be strong. But experienced townswomen related similar cases in which infants had grown stronger immediately after baptism. With this hope they comforted themselves, and their confidence was greatly increased by the name given to the Princess.

"Neither Boniface nor Bonifacia can die immediately after baptism," they said; "the child so named is destined to accomplish something great."

Next day, however, there came worse news from the castle, and the city was greatly excited. During the whole day, the churches were as crowded as they were during the time of absolution. Many votive offerings were given for the health of the Queen and the infant Princess. Poor peasants might have been seen offering grain, lamb, chicken, strings of dried mushrooms, and baskets of nuts. There were rich offerings from the knights, from the merchants, and from the artisans. Messengers were sent to the places where miracles were performed. Astrologers consulted the stars. In Krakow itself numerous processions were arranged, and in these all the guilds and fraternities took part. There was also a children's procession, for people imagined that these

innocent beings would be more likely to secure God's favour. Through the gates fresh crowds were constantly coming.

Thus day after day passed, with the continual ringing of bells, with the noise of the crowds in the churches, and with processions and prayers. But when at the end of a week the beloved Queen and the child were still living, hope began to enter all hearts. It seemed to them impossible that God could take from the kingdom the Queen who, having done so much for it, would thus be obliged to leave so much unfinished. The scholars told how much she had done for the schools; the clergy, how much for God's glory; the statesmen, how much for peace among Christian monarchs; the jurisconsults, how much for justice; the poor people, how much for poverty. They could not believe that a life so necessary to the kingdom and the world could be ended thus prematurely.

On the thirteenth day of July the tolling bells announced the death of the child. The people again swarmed through the streets of the city, and all were filled with uneasiness. The crowd again surrounded the Wawel, inquiring about the Queen's health. But now none came forth with good news. On the contrary, the faces of the lords entering the castle or returning from the city were gloomy, and every day the sadness increased. It was said that Bishop Stanislaw of Skarbimierz, and a master of liberal sciences in Krakow, never left the Queen's presence, and that every day she received Holy Communion. It was said also that after each Communion her room was filled with a celestial light. It had been seen through the windows; but such a sight sorely troubled the hearts devoted to the lady, for they feared it to be a sign that for her celestial life had already begun.

Not all believed that so dreadful a thing could happen. They reassured themselves with the hope that the justice of heaven would be satisfied with one victim. Nevertheless, on Friday morning, the seventeenth day of July, it became known that the Queen was in her last agony. All rushed towards the Wawel. The city was deserted; even mothers with their infants hastened towards the gates of the castle. The shops were closed, and no one cooked any food. All business was suspended, while round about the Wawel there was a sea of frightened, silent people.

At last, at the thirteenth hour after noon, the bell in the tower of the Cathedral resounded. The people did not at once understand what this meant, and they became uneasy. All heads and all eyes were turned towards the tower wherein the bell was tolling. Its mournful tones were soon repeated by other bells in the city—by those at the Franciscan Church, at Holy Trinity, and at Panna Marya. At length, the people understood, and their souls were filled with dread and with a great grief. Presently, a large black flag, embroidered with a death's head, appeared on the tower. All doubt now vanished; the Queen had rendered up her soul to God.

From beneath the castle walls the wailing and the cries of a hundred thousand people arose, mingling with the dismal voices of the bells. Some threw themselves on the ground; some tore their clothing or lacerated their faces; while others gazed in silent stupefaction at the walls. There were some who moaned, some who stretched their hands towards the church and towards the Queen's rooms, asked for a miracle through God's mercy. But there were also heard angry voices, which, moved by despair, verged at times upon blasphemy.

"Why have they taken our beloved Queen?" they asked. "For what purpose, then, were all our processions, our prayers, and our entreaties? Our gold and silver offerings were accepted, yet we have nothing in return for them! They took all, but gave us nothing!" Many others wept, crying, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" The crowds wanted to enter the castle, to look once more upon the Queen's face.

This, however, they were not permitted to do; but they were promised that the body should soon be placed in the church, where every one would be allowed to see it and pray beside it. Towards evening, therefore, the sorrowing people began to return to the city, talking about the Queen's last moments, the funeral, and the miracles which would be performed near her body and around her tomb. Some also said that immediately after her burial the Queen would be canonised, and when others said that they doubted whether this could be done, many grew angry, threatening, if necessary, to go to the Pope at Avignon for the purpose.

Sorrow fell upon the city and upon the whole country, and that not only among the common people, but among

all classes. The guiding star of the kingdom was quenched. The nobles were alarmed. They asked themselves what would now happen. Had the King the right to remain their sovereign after the Queen's death, or would he return to Lithuania and remain satisfied with the throne of the viceroy? Some of them supposed—and the future proved that they thought correctly—that the King himself would be willing to withdraw; and that, in such an event, the larger provinces would sever themselves from the Crown, and the Lithuanians would again begin their attacks upon the inhabitants of the kingdom. The Knights of the Cross, some thought, would become stronger; the Roman Emperor and the Hungarian King would become mightier; and the Polish kingdom, until yesterday one of the greatest in the world, would be ruined and disgraced.

The merchants, by whom great tracts in Lithuania and Russia had been opened up, foreseeing great losses, made pious vows, hoping that Jagiello might remain on the throne. But in that event they predicted a war with the Teutonic Order. It was known that the Queen alone could restrain the King's anger. The people recollected a previous occasion, when, being indignant at the avidity and rapacity of the Knights of the Cross, she had declared: "As long as I live, I will restrain my husband's hand and his righteous anger; but remember that, after my death, the punishment for your sins will fall upon you."

In their pride and folly they did not fear a war, thinking that, after the Queen's death, the charm of her piety would no longer restrain the desire for affluence of volunteers from eastern countries, and that then thousands of warriors from Germany, Burgundy, France, and other countries, would join the Knights of the Cross.

The death of Jadwiga was an event of such importance that the envoy, Lichtenstein, could no longer wait for the answer of the absent King. He set out immediately for Marienburg, in order to communicate the important and, in some measure, threatening news, to the Grand Master and to the chapter as soon as possible. The Hungarian, the Austrian, and the Bohemian envoys followed him, or sent messengers to their monarchs. Jagiello returned to Krakow in despair. At first he declared to the lords that he did not wish to rule without the Queen, and that he would there-

fore return to Lithuania. His grief afterwards threw him into such a stupor that he could not attend to any affairs of State, and was unable to answer any questions. At certain moments he was very angry with himself for having gone away, and for not having been present at the Queen's death-bed to bid her farewell, and listen to her last words and wishes. In vain Stanislaw of Skarbimierz and Bishop Wysz explained to him that the Queen's illness came suddenly, and that, according to all human calculations, he would have had ample time to go and return if the confinement had occurred at the expected time. These words did not bring him any consolation, and did not assuage his grief.

"I am no King without her," he answered the Bishop. "I am but a repentant sinner, who can receive no consolation!" He then turned his eyes on the ground, and no one could induce him to speak a word.

Meanwhile, preparations for the Queen's funeral occupied all minds. From every part of the country, great crowds of lords, nobles, and peasants hastened towards Krakow. The Queen's body was placed on a platform in the Cathedral, arranged in such a manner that the head of the coffin was raised much higher than the foot. By this means the people were enabled to see the Queen's face. In the Cathedral prayers were continually being offered up; around the catafalque were thousands of wax candles, and among the flowers, the Queen lay calm and smiling, looking like a mystic rose. The people saw in her a saint; they brought to her those possessed with devils, the crippled, and sick children. From time to time there was heard in the church the exclamation of some mother who perceived the colour return to the face of her sick child, or the joyful voice of some paralytic cured of his malady. All human hearts trembled as the news spread throughout the church, the castle, and the city, and thus ever more and more of those wretched creatures, who can look for help from miracles alone, were attracted to the royal bier.

CHAPTER VII.

DURING all this time Zbyszko was entirely forgotten. Who in such a time of sorrow and misfortune would be likely to remember the noble youth or his imprisonment in the castle tower? Zbyszko, however, had heard from the guards of the Queen's illness. He had heard the noise of the people around the castle. When he heard their weeping and the tolling of the bells, he threw himself on his knees, and, forgetting his own lot, mourned the death of the saintly lady. It seemed to him that with her death something died within himself, and that, after her death, there was nothing left worth living for in the world.

The echoes of the funeral—the church bells, the processional songs, and the lamentations of the crowd—were heard for several weeks. During that time he grew gloomier, and lost his appetite; he was unable to sleep, and walked about in his underground cell like a wild beast in a cage. He suffered, too, from neglect. There were often days during which the jailor did not bring him food or water. So much was every one occupied with the Queen's funeral that, after her death, no one came to see him, neither the Princess nor Danusia, neither Powala of Taczew nor the merchant Amylej. Zbyszko reflected with bitterness that as soon as Macko had left the city every one forgot him. Sometimes he thought that perhaps the law, too, would forget him, and that he would rot to death in his dungeon. Then he prayed for death.

When a month had passed since the Queen's funeral he began to doubt whether Macko would ever return. Macko had promised to ride quickly, and not to spare his horse. Marienburg was not at the other end of the world. One might reach it and return again within twelve weeks if one made haste. "But perhaps he has not hastened!" thought Zbyszko bitterly; "perhaps he has found some woman whom he would gladly conduct to Bogdaniec,

there to beget his own progeny, while I must wait here ages for God's mercy."

Soon he lost all trace of time. Only by the spider's web, which thickly covered the iron grating of the window, did he know that the autumn was near at hand. For hours he sat on his bed, his elbows resting on his knees, his fingers in his long hair. Dazed and motionless, he did not raise his head even when the warden spoke to him while bringing him his food. But one day the bolts of the door creaked at last, and a familiar voice called him from the threshold:

"Zbyszko!"

"Uncle!" exclaimed Zbyszko, rushing from the bed.

Macko seized him in his arms, and began to kiss his fair head. Grief, bitterness, and loneliness had so filled the heart of the youth that he began to cry on his uncle's breast like a little child.

"I thought you would never come back," said he, sobbing.

"Your thought came near being true," answered Macko.

"Why, what happened to you?" asked Zbyszko, raising his head and looking at him closely.

He gazed in amazement at the emaciated and pallid face of the old warrior, at his bent figure and grey hair.

"What happened to you?" he repeated.

Macko sat on the bed, and for a time breathed heavily.

"What happened?" he said at last. "Hardly had I passed the frontier before some Germans, whom I met in the forest, wounded me with a crossbow. Robber-knights! You know the brood! I cannot breathe! God sent me help, otherwise you would not see me here now."

"Who rescued you?"

"Jurand of Spychow," answered Macko.

There was a moment of silence.

"They attacked me; but half a day later he attacked them, and scarce half of them escaped. He took me with him to Spychow. I fought with death for three weeks. God did not let me die, and although I am not yet well, I have returned."

"Then you have not been in Marienburg?"

"On what could I ride? They robbed me of everything; of the letter as well. I returned to ask Princess Ziemowitowa for another; but I have not yet met her,

and whether I shall see her or not, I do not know. I must now prepare for the other world!"

Having said this, he spat on the palm of his hand and, stretching it towards Zbyszko, showed him blood upon it.

"Do you see?" he asked. "But it must be God's will," he added resignedly.

Both remained silent for a time beneath the burden of their gloomy thoughts.

"Then you spit blood continually?" Zbyszko asked.

"How should I help it; there is a spear-head half a span long between my ribs. With that you would spit blood also! I was a little better before I left Jurand of Spychow; but now I am very tired, for the way was long, and I hastened."

"Ah! why did you hasten?"

"Because I wished to see Princess Alexandra and get another letter from her. Jurand of Spychow said, 'Go, and bring the letter to Spychow. I have a few Germans imprisoned here. I will free one of them if he promise upon his knightly word to carry the letter to the Grand Master.' Out of vengeance for his wife's death, he always keeps several German captives, and listens joyfully to their moaning and the rattling of their chains. He is a man full of hatred. Do you understand?"

"I do. But I wonder that you did not recover the lost letter, seeing that Jurand captured those who attacked you."

"He did not capture all of them. Five or six escaped. Such was our lot!"

"How did they attack you? From an ambush?"

"From behind such thick bushes that one could see nothing. I was riding without armour, because the merchants told me that the country was safe, and the days were warm."

"Who was at the head of the robbers? A Knight of the Cross?"

"Not a monk, but a German. Chelminczyk of Lentz, famous for his robberies on the highway."

"What became of him?"

"Jurand has put him in chains. But the German has in his dungeons two noblemen, Mazovians, whom he wishes to exchange for himself."

There was a moment of silence.

"Dear Jesus!" said Zbyszko, after a pause, "Lichtenstein is alive, and also that robber from Lentz; but we must perish without vengeance. They will behead me, and you will not be able to live through the winter."

"Pshaw! I shall not live even until the winter. If I could but help you in some way to escape!"

"Have you seen any one here?"

"I have seen the castellan of Krakow. When I learned that Lichtenstein had departed, I thought perhaps the castellan would be less severe."

"Then Lichtenstein has gone?"

"Immediately after the Queen's death he went to Marienburg. I went to see the castellan, but he answered me thus: 'Your nephew will be executed, not to please Lichtenstein, but because such is his sentence. It will make no difference whether Lichtenstein be here or not. The King can show clemency, but no one else.'"

"And where is the King?"

"After the funeral he went to Rus."

"Well, then there is no hope at all."

"No. The castellan said still further: 'I pity him, because the Princess Anna begs for his pardon; but I cannot, I cannot!'"

"Then Princess Anna is still here?"

"May God reward her! She is a good lady. She is still here, for Jurandowna is sick, and the Princess loves her as her own child."

"For God's sake! Then Danusia is sick! What ails her?"

"I do not know. The Princess says that some one has thrown a spell over her."

"I am sure it is Lichtenstein! No one else, only Lichtenstein—a dog-brother!"

"It may be he. But what can you do to him? Nothing!"

"That is why they all seem to have forgotten me here. She was sick."

Having said this, Zbyszko began to walk up and down the room. At length he seized Macko's hand, and kissed it.

"May God reward you for everything!" he said. "If you die, I shall have been the cause of your death. Before you are worse, you must do one thing more. Go to the castellan and beg him to release me, on my knightly

word, for twelve weeks. After that time, I will return, and they may behead me. But it must not be that we both die without vengeance. I shall go to Marienburg, and immediately send a challenge to Lichtenstein. It cannot be otherwise. One of us must die!"

Macko began to rub his forehead.

"I will go," he said; "but will the castellan consent?"

"I will give him my knightly word. For twelve weeks—I do not ask more."

"It is useless to talk! Twelve weeks! And if you are wounded, and cannot return, what will they think then?"

"I will return, if I have to crawl. But do not fear! In the meanwhile, the King may return, and one will be able to beseech him for clemency."

"That is true!" answered Macko. "But," he added, after a pause, "the castellan also told me this: 'Through the Queen's death we forgot about your nephew; but now his sentence must be executed.'"

"Oh, he will consent!" answered Zbyszko hopefully. "He knows that a nobleman will keep his word; and it is just the same to him whether they behead me now or after St. Michael's Day."

"Ha! I will go to him to-day."

"Go to Amylej to-day and rest. He will bandage your wound, and to-morrow you can go to the castellan."

"Well, with God, then!"

"With God!"

They embraced, and Macko turned towards the door; but he stopped on the threshold, and frowned as if he remembered something unpleasant.

"Pshaw! But you do not yet wear the belt of a knight. Lichtenstein will tell you that he will not fight with you. What can you do then?"

Zbyszko was filled with sorrow, but only for a moment.

"How is it during war?" he asked. "Is it necessary that a knight choose only knights?"

"War is war; a single combat is quite otherwise."

"True, but wait! You must find some way. Well, there is a way. Prince Janusz will dub me a knight. If the Princess and Danusia ask him, he will do it. In the meantime, I will fight in Mazovia with the son of Mikolaj of Dlugolas."

"Why?"

"Because Mikolaj, the same who is with the Princess and whom they call Obuch, called Danusia a shrub!"

Macko looked at him in amazement.

"I cannot forgive that," said Zbyszko, wishing to explain better what had occurred; "but I cannot fight with Mikolaj, because he must be nearly eighty years old."

"Listen!" said Macko. "It is a pity that you should lose your head; but there will be no great loss of brains, for you are as foolish as a goat."

"Why are you angry?"

Macko did not answer, but prepared to leave.

Zbyszko sprang towards him and said:

"How is Danusia? Is she well yet? Do not be angry for a trifle. You have been absent so long!"

Again he bent towards the old man, who shrugged his shoulders, and said mildly:

"Jurandowna is well, only they will not let her leave her room yet. Farewell!"

Although Zbyszko remained alone, he felt as if he had been regenerated. He rejoiced to think that he might be allowed to live three months more. He might go to remote lands; he might meet Lichtenstein, and engage in deadly combat with him. The thought of that filled him with joy. Whatever might happen, it would at least seem a long time. The King might return and forgive him. War might break out, and the castellan himself, when he saw the victor of the haughty Lichtenstein, might say: "Go now into the woods and the fields!"

A great hope entered his heart. He did not think that they could refuse to grant him those three months. The old Pan of Tenczyn would never admit that a nobleman could not keep his word.

So, when Macko came to the prison next day towards evening, Zbyszko sprang towards him and asked:

"Is it granted?"

Macko sat down on the truckle-bed, for he could not stand on account of his feebleness. For a while he breathed heavily, but at length he spoke:

"The castellan says: 'If you wish to divide your land or attend to your household, then I will release your nephew for one week or two weeks on his word of honour, but for no longer.'"

Zbyszko was so much surprised that at first he could not say a word.

"For two weeks?" said he at last. "But I could not even reach the frontier in two weeks! How is this?"

You did not tell the castellan why I wished to go to Marienburg?"

"Not only I, but the Princess Anna also begged for you."

"And what then?"

"What then? The old man told her that he did not want your head, and that he pitied you. 'If I could find,' said he, 'some law in his favour, or even some pretext, I would release him altogether; but I cannot. There would be no order in a country in which the people shut their eyes to the law, and acted merely in accordance with friendship. I will not do it; even if it were Toporczyk, who is a relative of mine, or even my own brother, I would not.' Such hard men have we here! And he said still further: 'We do not care for the Knights of the Cross, but we cannot bring reproach upon ourselves. What would they think of us, and all our guests from every part of the world, if I were to release a nobleman sentenced to death in order to give him a chance to fight? Would they believe that he will really be punished, and that there is any law in our country? I prefer to order one head to be cut off, rather than bring contempt on the King and the kingdom.' The Princess told him that that was strange justice from which even a king's relative might not obtain anything by her prayer; but the old man answered: 'The King may use clemency, but he will not tolerate lawlessness.' Then they began to quarrel, for the Princess grew very angry. 'But,' said she, 'do not keep him in prison!' And the castellan replied to this: 'Very well. To-morrow I will order a scaffold to be built in the market-place.' Then they departed. Only the Lord Jesus can help you."

There was a long period of silence.

"Well," Zbyszko said gloomily, "then it will be immediately?"

"In two or three days. There is no help. I have done what I could. I fell at the castellan's knees, I implored him for mercy, but he repeated: 'Find a law or a pretext.' But what can I find? I went to see Bishop Stanislaw of Skarbimierz, and begged him to come to you. At least you will have this honour, that the same priest who heard the Queen's confession will hear yours. But I did not find him at home; he had gone to Princess Anna."

"Perhaps to see Danusia!"

"Not at all. The girl is better. I will go and see him early to-morrow. They say that if he hears one's confession, salvation is as sure as if it were in one's pocket."

Zbyszko placed his elbows on his knees, and dropped his head, so that his hair covered his face. The old man looked at him a long time, and then began to call to him softly:

"Zbyszko! Zbyszko!"

The boy raised his head. His face had an expression of anger and cold hatred, but not of weakness.

"What?"

"Listen carefully. Perhaps I have found a way of escape."

Having said this, he approached the youth.

"Have you heard of Prince Witold," he whispered, "who, when imprisoned by our King in Krewo, went out from the prison disguised in a woman's dress? There is no woman who will remain here instead of you, but take my kubrak.* Take my kubrak and go; do you understand? They will not see. It is dark behind the door. They will not flash a light into your eyes. They saw me go out yesterday, but they did not look at me closely. Be quiet and listen. They will find me here to-morrow, and what then? Will they cut my head off? That will be no satisfaction to them, for I must die in any case in three or four weeks. And you, as soon as you are out of here, to horse, and straight to Prince Witold! You will present yourself to him; he will receive you, and you will be as safe with him as if you were sitting at God's right hand. They say here that the Prince's armies have been defeated by the Tartars, because the late Queen prophesied defeat. If this be true, he will need soldiers, and he will welcome you. You must remain with him, for there is no better service in the world. If our King were defeated in a war, it would be his end; but there is such an amount of shrewdness in Prince Witold that after a defeat he grows still more powerful. He is liberal also, and he loves our family. Tell him everything that has happened. Tell him that you wished to go with him against the Tartars, but that you could not, because you were imprisoned in the tower. If God permit he will give you some land and peasants; he will dub you a

* A kind of great coat.

knight, and he will intercede for you with the King. You will see."

Zbyszko listened silently, and Macko, as if excited by his own words, continued:

"You must not perish so young; you must return to Bogdaniec. And when you return, you must take a wife, so that our family may not perish. Only when you have children may you challenge Lichtenstein to fight to the death; but until then you must abstain from seeking vengeance. Take my kubrak, I say, and go—in God's name!"

Having said this, Macko stood up and began to remove his kubrak. But Zbyszko rose also and stopped him.

"I will not do it!" he said; "so help me God and the Holy Cross!"

"Why?" asked Macko in astonishment.

"Because I will not!"

Macko turned pale with anger.

"I wish you had never been born!" he exclaimed.

"You told the castellan," said Zbyszko, "that you would give your head in exchange for mine."

"How do you know that?"

"The Pan of Taczew told me."

"What of that?"

"What of that? The castellan told you that disgrace would fall on me and on all my family. Would it not be still greater disgrace if I escaped from here and left you to the vengeance of the law?"

"What vengeance? What can the law do to me, when I must die just the same? Be wise, for God's mercy!"

"May God punish me if I abandon you, now that you are old and sick! Pfui! Shame!"

There was silence. One could hear only the heavy, hoarse breathing of Macko, and the calling of the archers.

"Listen!" Macko said at length, in a broken voice. "It was not shameful for Prince Witold to escape from Krewo; it would not be for you either."

"Ah!" answered Zbyszko with sadness. "Kniaz Witold, as you well know, is a great Prince; he received a crown from the King's hand, with riches and dominions. But I, a poor nobleman, have only my honour."

He paused for a few moments, and then seemed to be seized with a sudden burst of anger.

"Then you do not understand," he exclaimed hotly,

“that I love you, and that I will not let you give your head instead of mine!”

At these words Macko trembled as he stood, and stretched out his hands towards the youth. And although men's natures in those days were hard as forged iron, he cried out tenderly in a heart-broken voice:

“Zbyszko! Zbyszko!”

CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT day the Court servants began to make preparations in the market-place for building the scaffold, which was to be erected opposite the principal gate of the City Hall.

The Princess, however, was still consulting with Wojciech Jastrzembiec, Stanislaw of Skarbimierz, and other learned canons, who were familiar with the written laws, and also with the laws sanctioned by custom. She was encouraged to these efforts by the castellan's words when he said that, if they showed him "law or pretext," he would free Zbyszko. They therefore consulted earnestly to ascertain whether there were any law or custom that would fit the case. Although Bishop Stanislaw had prepared Zbyszko for death, and had administered the last sacraments, he went directly from the prison to the consultation, which lasted almost until daybreak.

The day of execution arrived. Since early morning, crowds of people had been gathering in the market-place. News of the youth and great beauty of the condemned man spread among the women, and the road leading to the castle was filled with crowds of townswomen, dressed in their best; in the windows looking on the market square, and on the balconies, could be seen velvet bonnets, or the fair heads of young girls, ornamented with wreaths of lilies and roses. Although the affair was not within their jurisdiction, the city councillors all appeared, in order to exhibit their importance. The knights, wishing to show their sympathy for the young man, gathered, in great numbers round the structure. Behind them swarmed the gaily dressed crowd, composed of small merchants and artisans dressed in their guild costumes. Above this compact mass of human heads rose the scaffold, which was covered with new broad-cloth. On the elevation stood the executioner, a broad-shouldered German, wearing a red kubrak, and over his head a cowl of the same colour. He

carried a heavy two-edged sword, and had two assistants with naked arms, and ropes at their girdles. At hand there were also a block and a coffin, covered with broadcloth. In Panna Marya's tower the bells were ringing, filling the town with their metallic clangour, and frightening the flocks of doves and jackdaws. The people gazed at the scaffold and at the executioner's sword, which glittered in the sun. They gazed eagerly at the knights, whom the burghers always regarded with respect. On this occasion they were well worth looking at, for the most famous knights of the time were standing round the scaffold. General attention was attracted by the pale face of Macko of Bogdaniec. He was supported by Floryan of Korytnica and Marcin of Wrocimowice. It was generally thought that he was the condemned man's father.

But the greatest curiosity was aroused by Powala of Taczew, who, standing in the front, was holding Danusia, dressed in white, with a wreath of green rue resting on her fair head. The people could not understand what this meant. Some thought the girl was a sister, others that she was the lady of the knight; but none were able to explain the meaning of her dress or of her presence at the scaffold. The sight of her fair face covered with tears aroused commiseration and emotion. The people began to censure the castellan's stubbornness and the severity of the laws. The censures gradually changed to threats. At length, voices were heard to say, here and there, that if only the scaffold could be destroyed, the execution must be postponed. The crowd became eager and excited. It was said that, if only the King were present, he would surely pardon the youth.

All became quiet when distant shouts announced the approach of the King's archers, escorting the prisoner. The procession soon appeared in the square. It was preceded by a funeral fraternity, the members of which were dressed in long black cloaks, and were covered with veils of the same colour, which had openings cut for the eyes. The people were awed by these gloomy figures, and became silent. They were followed by a detachment of soldiers, armed with crossbows and dressed in elkskin jerkins. These were the King's Lithuanian guards. Behind them, one could see the halberds of another detachment of soldiers. In the centre, between the clerk of the Court,

who was to read the sentence, and Bishop Stanislaw of Skarbimierz, who carried a crucifix, walked Zbyszko.

All eyes were now turned towards him, and from all the windows and at all the balconies women's heads protruded. Zbyszko was dressed in his white jaka, embroidered with golden griffins and galooned with gold; in these magnificent garments he looked like a young prince or the page of some great court. His broad shoulders and chest and his powerful loins indicated that he was already a full-grown man; but above the strong, manly figure appeared a youthful face with down upon the upper lip. It was a beautiful face, like that of a king's page, with golden hair cut evenly over the eyebrows and falling on the shoulders. He walked erect, but was very pale. From time to time he looked at the crowd as if in a dream; he looked at the church towers, at the flocks of jackdaws, and at the bells, then ringing his last hour. His face expressed amazement when he realised that the sobbing of the women—that all this solemnity—was for him. Finally, he perceived the scaffold and the red figure of the executioner standing upon it. He shivered and made the sign of the cross, the priest giving him the crucifix to kiss. A few steps further, a bouquet of roses, thrown by a young girl, fell at his feet. Zbyszko stooped, picked up the bouquet, and smiled at the girl, who began to weep. But, apparently, he thought that, amid these crowds and in the presence of the women waving their kerchiefs from the windows, it behoved him to die courageously, and at least leave behind him the reputation of a brave man. He therefore strained his courage and will to the uttermost. With a sudden movement he threw back his hair, raised his head still higher, and walked proudly, almost like a conqueror being led, according to knightly custom, to receive the prize for valour. The procession advanced slowly, for the crowd was dense and reluctant to make way. In vain the Lithuanian guard, marching in front, shouted: "Make way! Make way!"

The people would not heed these words, but surrounded the soldiers more closely still. Although about one-third of the burghers of Krakow were Germans, still there were heard on all sides threats against the Knights of the Cross.

"Shame! Shame! May they perish, those wolves! Must children's heads be cut off for them? Shame on the King and on the kingdom!"

The Lithuanians, seeing the resistance, took their crossbows from their shoulders, and menaced the crowd; but they did not dare to attack without orders. The captain sent some men to open the way with their halberds, and in this manner they reached the knights standing round the scaffold. These stepped aside without any resistance. The men with halberds entered first, and they were followed by Zbyszko, accompanied by the priest and the clerk of the Court.

At that moment something happened which no one had foreseen. From among the knights, Powala stepped forward with Danusia in his arms, and shouted "Stop!" in such a commanding voice that the whole retinue stopped at once as if rooted to the ground. Neither the captain nor any of the soldiers dared to oppose the lord and knight whom they were accustomed to see in the castle every day, very often in confidential conversation with the King. Presently other knights, equally distinguished, also began to shout in tones of command: "Stop! Stop!"

In the meantime, the Pan of Taczew approached Zbyszko, conducting Danusia towards him. Zbyszko caught her in his arms and pressed her to his bosom, bidding her farewell; but Danusia, instead of nestling to him and embracing him, immediately took her white veil from her head, cast it over Zbyszko's head, and began to cry in a tearful, childish voice:

"He is mine! He is mine!"

"He is hers! He is hers!" shouted the deep voices of the knights. "To the castellan!"

An answering shout, like the roar of thunder, burst forth:

"To the castellan! To the castellan!"

The priest raised his eyes, and the clerk looked confused. The captain and his soldiers dropped their arms. Every one understood what had happened.

There was an old Polish and Slav custom having the force of law, known in Podhale, round about Krakow, and even elsewhere. If a young girl threw her veil over a man being conducted to death, as a sign that she wished to marry him, by so doing she saved his life. The knights, farmers, villagers, and townsmen all knew this

custom, and the Germans living in the old cities and towns had also heard of it.

Old Macko almost fainted with emotion; the knights, pushing away the guards, surrounded Zbyszko and Danusia, the joyful people shouting again and again:

"To the castellan! To the castellan!"

The crowd moved suddenly, like the waves of the sea. The executioner and his assistant hurried down from the scaffold. Everybody understood that, if Jasko of Tenczyn were to resist the custom, there would be a riot in the city. The people, indeed, now rushed towards the scaffold. In the twinkling of an eye they had pulled off the cloth and torn it to pieces. The beams and planks, wrenched asunder by many strong arms, or cut with axes, began to creak; then there was a crash, and a few moments later there was not a trace left of the fabric.

Zbyszko, holding Danusia in his arms, was now on his way to the castle, but this time, like a true victor, in triumph. With him marched joyfully the most famous knights in the kingdom. Thousands of men, women, and children shouted and sang, stretching out their arms towards Danusia, and praising the beauty and courage of the lovers. At the windows the townswomen clasped their hands, and everywhere could be seen faces covered with tears of joy. A shower of roses, lilies, ribands, and even gold rings was thrown towards the fortunate youth. He, beaming like the sun, and with his heart full of gratitude, embraced his sweet lady from time to time, sometimes kissing her hands. This sight so affected the townswomen that some of them threw themselves into the arms of their lovers, telling them that, if they encountered death, they also should be freed. Zbyszko and Danusia were now the beloved children of the knights, of the burghers, and of the common people. Macko was almost beside himself with joy. He wondered that he had not even thought of this means of assistance. Amidst the general bustle, Powala of Taczew informed the knights that the remedy had been discovered by Wojciech Jastrzembiec and Stanislaw of Skarbimierz, both experts in the written laws and customs. The knights were all amazed at its simplicity, saying among themselves that nobody else could have thought of the custom, for the city was inhabited by Germans, and it had fallen into desuetude.

Everything, however, still depended on the castellan. The knights and the people went to the castle which was occupied by the Pan of Krakow during the King's absence. The clerk of the Court, Stanislaw of Skarbimierz, Zawisza, Farurej, Zyndram of Maszkow, and Powala of Taczew explained to him the force of the custom, and reminded him of what he had said himself, that if "law or pretext" could be found, then he would release the prisoner. And could there be any better law, they asked, than this old custom which had never been abolished?

The Pan answered that the custom applied more to the common people and to robbers than to nobles; but he knew the law well, and could not deny its validity. Meanwhile, he covered his silvery beard with his hand and smiled, for he was really well pleased. At length, he went to the low portico, accompanied by Princess Anna Danuta, a few priests, and the knights.

Zbyszko, perceiving him, again raised Danusia; the old castellan placed his hand upon her golden hair, and gravely and benevolently bowed his hoary head. The assembled people understood this sign, and shouted so that the very walls of the castle were shaken.

"May God preserve you!" they cried. "Long life, just lord! Long life to judge us!"

Then the people cheered Zbyszko and Danusia, when, a moment later, the pair went towards the portico, and fell at the feet of the good Princess Anna Danuta, who really had saved Zbyszko's life, for it was she who, with the aid of the scholars, had found the remedy and had taught Danusia how to act.

"Long life to the lovers!" shouted Powala of Taczew.

"Long life! Long life!" repeated the others.

"Gracious Princess," said the castellan, hoary with age, turning towards her, "the betrothal must be performed forthwith, for the custom requires it!"

"The betrothal shall take place at once," answered the good lady, whose face was now radiant with joy; "but for the wedding they must have the consent of Jurand of Spsychow."

PART II.

CHAPTER IX.

IN the house of Amylej the merchant, Macko and Zbyszko were deliberating with regard to the future. The old knight expected to die soon, and Father Cybek, a Franciscan friar who had experience in the treatment of wounds, had also predicted his end. Macko therefore wished to return to Bogdaniec to die and be buried with his fathers in the cemetery of Ostrow.

Yet not all of his forefathers were buried there. In former days there had been many wloodykas in the family. On their shields they had emblazoned a Tempa Podkowa, for they claimed to be better wloodykas than those others who had no right to a coat of arms. In 1331, in the battle of Plowce, seventy warriors from Bogdaniec were killed in the marshes by German archers. Only one, Wojciech, called Tur, escaped. After this defeat by the Germans the King, Wladyslaw Lokietek, granted to Tur a coat of arms and the estate of Bogdaniec. Wojciech then returned home, only to learn of the complete annihilation of his family.

While the men of Bogdaniec were perishing from the German arrows, the robber-knights of Szlonsk fell upon their homes and burned their buildings, slaughtering the peasants or taking them captive. Wojciech remained alone, the heir to a large but devastated tract of land, which had formerly belonged to the whole family of wloodykas. Five years afterwards he married, and begot two sons, Jasko and Macko. Soon afterwards he was killed by a urus which attacked him in the forest.

The sons grew up under the mother's care. Her maiden name was Kachna of Spalenica. She was so brave that she conducted two successful expeditions against the

Germans of Szlonsk to avenge former wrongs, but in a third expedition she was killed. Before her death, however, she had built, with the help of her slaves, a castle in Bogdaniec, so that Jasko and Macko, although wloodykas in their former estate, were now also men of importance.

When Jasko came of age, he married Jagienka of Mocarzew, and begot Zbyszko. Macko remained unmarried and took care of his nephew's property, so far as his many expeditions permitted.

But when, during the civil war between the Grzymalits and the Nalenczs, Bogdaniec was again burned, and the peasants were scattered, Macko could not restore it, although he toiled at the work for several years.

At length, he pledged the land to his relative, the abbot, and with Zbyszko, then almost a child, he went to Lithuania to fight against the Germans.

Yet he had never forgotten Bogdaniec. He went to Lithuania hoping to become rich with booty, so that he might return to Bogdaniec, redeem the land from pledge, colonise it with slaves, rebuild the castle, and settle Zbyszko on the estates. So now, after Zbyszko's happy deliverance, they discussed this matter at the house of Amylej the merchant.

They had money enough to redeem the land. They possessed quite a fortune derived from the booty, from the ransoms paid by the knights captured by them, and from Witold's presents. They had gained much by the fight with the two Frisian knights. The suits of armour alone were worth what, in those times, was considered a fortune. Besides the armour, they had captured waggons, men and women, clothes, money, and costly implements of war. Amylej the merchant had purchased many of these things, among them being two pieces of beautiful Flemish broad-cloth. Macko sold his splendid armour, for he thought that he would have no further use for it. The merchant sold it the next day to Marcin of Wrocimowice, whose coat of arms was "Polkoza." He sold it for a large sum, for in those times the suits of armour made in Milan were the most expensive, and were considered the best in the world. Zbyszko, however, greatly regretted that it had been sold.

"If God should give you back your health," said he to his uncle, "where will you find another like it?"

"Where I found this one—on the back of some German,"

answered Macko. "But I shall not escape death. The head of the spear will not come out of my body. When I tried to pull it out with my hands, I only pushed it in further. And now there is no help."

"You must drink two or three pots of bear's grease."

"Pshaw! Father Cybek also said that would be a good thing. But where can I get it here? Were we at Bogdaniec one could very easily kill a bear!"

"Then we must go to Bogdaniec! But you must not die on the road."

Old Macko looked tenderly at his nephew.

"I know where you would like to go," he said; "to the Court of Prince Janusz, or to Jurand of Spychow, to fight the Germans of Chelminsko."

"I will not deny it," answered Zbyszko. "I should be glad to go to Warsaw with the Princess's Court, or to go to Ciechanow; and I would remain as long as possible with Danusia, for now she is not only my lady, but my love. I tremble when I think of her! I will follow her even to the end of the world. But you are first. You did not desert me, and I will never abandon you. We must go to Bogdaniec."

"You are a good lad," said Macko.

"God would punish me if I were not mindful of you. Look, they are getting ready! I ordered one waggon to be filled with hay. Amylejowna has made us a present of a feather bed, but I am afraid it will be too warm for you. We will travel slowly, in company with the Princess's Court, so that you may have good care. When they turn towards Mazovia we shall turn towards home. May God help us!"

"If I may only live long enough to rebuild the grodek!"* exclaimed Macko. "I know that after my death you will think no more of Bogdaniec."

"Why should I not?"

"Because your head will be filled with thoughts of battles and of love."

"Did not you yourself think of war? I have determined what I shall do. In the first place, I will rebuild the grodek."

"Do you mean what you say?" asked Macko. "Well, and when the grodek is finished?"

* A small castle.

"When the grodek is rebuilt, then I shall go to the Prince's Court in Warsaw, or to Ciechanow."

"After my death?"

"If you die soon, then after your death. But before I go, I will bury you properly. But if the Lord Jesus restore your health, then you will remain in Bogdaniec. The Princess promised me that I should receive my knightly belt from the Prince. Otherwise, Lichtenstein will not fight with me."

"And afterwards you will go to Marienburg?"

"To Marienburg, or even to the end of the world—to meet Lichtenstein."

"I do not blame you for it! Either he or you must die!"

"I will bring his belt and his gloves to Bogdaniec; have no fear!"

"You must beware of treachery. There is much of it among them."

"I will bow before Prince Janusz, and ask him to send to the Grand Master for a safe conduct. There is peace now. I will go to Marienburg, where there are always many knights. Then—you know! In the first place, Lichtenstein; afterwards, I will look for those who wear peacock plumes, and I will challenge them in turn. If the Lord Jesus grant me victory, then I shall have fulfilled my vow."

So saying, Zbyszko smiled at his own thoughts; his face was like that of a boy who relates the knightly deeds he will perform when he is a man.

"Hah!" said Macko, "if you defeat three knights belonging to great families then you will not only fulfil your vow, but you will bring home booty!"

"Three!" exclaimed Zbyszko. "In prison I promised myself that I should not be niggardly with Danusia—as many knights as I have fingers on both hands!"

Macko shrugged his shoulders.

"Are you surprised?" said Zbyszko. "From Marienburg I shall go to Jurand of Spychow. Why should I not bow before him? He is Danusia's father. With him I will attack the Germans of Chelminsko. You yourself have told me that in the whole of Mazovia there is no greater were-wolf against the Germans."

"And if he will not give you Danusia?"

"Why should he not? He is seeking his vengeance.

I am searching for mine. Can he find a better man? And then, the Princess has given her consent to the betrothal. He will not refuse."

"I perceive one thing," said Macko; "you will take all the people from Bogdaniec in order to have a retinue, as is proper for a knight, and the land will be left without hands to till it. As long as I live, I will not let you do it; but after my death, I see, you will take them away."

"The Lord God will help me to a retinue. Janko of Tulcza is a relative of ours, and he also will help me."

At that moment the door opened, and, as though to prove that God meant to help Zbyszko to a retinue, two men entered. They were swarthy and short, and were dressed in yellow caftans, red caps, and very wide trousers. They stopped in the doorway, placed their fingers to their foreheads, their mouths, and their breasts, and then bowed to the ground.

"Who are these devils?" asked Macko. "Who are you?"

"Your slaves," answered the new-comers in broken Polish.

"For what reason? Whence do you come? Who sent you here?"

"Pan Zawisza sent us here as a present to the young knight, to be his slaves."

"Oh, for God's sake! Two men more!" exclaimed Macko joyfully.

"Of what nation are you?"

"We are Turks."

"Turks!" repeated Zbyszko. "I shall have two Turks in my retinue! Have you ever seen Turks, uncle?"

Springing forward, he began to turn them about, and to look at them curiously.

"I have never seen them," Macko said; "but I have heard that the Pan of Garbow had in his service Turks whom he captured while fighting on the Danube with the Roman Emperor, Sigismund. How is it? Are you heathens?"

"Our lord ordered us to be baptized," said one of the slaves.

"Did you have no money for ransom?"

"We are from far lands, from Asiatic shores—from Brussa."

Zbyszko, who always listened gladly to tales of battles,

especially when there was anything to be learned of the deeds of the famous Zawisza of Garbow, inquired how they came to be captured.

But there was nothing extraordinary in their narration. Zawisza had attacked them in a ravine. Some of them were slain, and some were captured. The victor had sent the prisoners as presents to his different friends. The hearts of Zbyszko and Macko throbbed at the sight of such a noble gift, for it was difficult to get men in those days, and the possession of them constituted true wealth.

Zawisza himself, accompanied by Powala and Pasko Zlodziej of Biskupice, now arrived. As they had all laboured hard to free Zbyszko, they were greatly pleased at his release, and each presented him with a gift to celebrate the event. The generous Pan of Taczew gave a beautiful large caparison, embroidered with gold, and Pasko a Hungarian sword and ten silver marks. Then came Lis of Targowisko, Farurej, and Krzon of Kozięglowy, with Marcin of Wrocimowice, and finally Zyndram of Maszkow, every one of whom brought rich presents. Zbyszko welcomed them with a joyful heart. They asked him about his departure and Macko's health, recommending to the latter different remedies which would miraculously heal wounds.

But Macko recommended Zbyszko to their care, being himself ready for the other world. He said that it was impossible for a man to live with an iron spear-head between his ribs. He complained that he spat blood, and that he could not eat. A quart of shelled nuts, a sausage two spans long, and a dish of boiled eggs were all he could eat at a sitting. Father Cybek had bled him several times, hoping in that way to draw out the fever from around his heart and restore his appetite. But this had not eased him.

Yet he was so pleased with the presents given to his nephew that for the moment he felt better; and when Amylej the merchant ordered a barrel of wine to be brought in, in honour of such famous guests, Macko drank with them. They began to talk of Zbyszko's deliverance, and his betrothal to Danusia. The knights did not doubt that Jurand of Spychow would give his consent, especially if Zbyszko should avenge the death of Danusia's mother and capture the peacock plumes.

"But as for Lichtenstein," said Zawisza, "I do not

think he will accept your challenge, for he is a monk, as well as an officer of the Order. Pshaw! The people of his retinue told me that perhaps he would be elected Grand Master!"

"If he refuse to fight, he will lose his honour," said Lis of Targowisko.

"No," answered Zawisza, "for he is not a lay knight, and a monk is not permitted to fight in single combat."

"But it often happens that they do fight."

"Because the Order has become corrupt. The knights make various vows, but they often break them, thus setting a bad example to the whole Christian world. But a Krzyzak, especially if a komthur, is not obliged to accept a challenge."

"Ha! Then you can meet him only in war?"

"But they say that there will be no war," said Zbyszko, "because the Knights of the Cross are afraid of our nation."

"This peace will not last long," answered Zyndram of Maszkow. "There can be no good understanding with the wolf, for he must live on the goods of others."

"In the meantime, perhaps, we shall be obliged to fight with Timur the Lame," said Powala. "Prince Witold was defeated by Edyga; that is certain."

"Certain? The Lord Palatine Spytko will not return?" said Paszko Zlodziej of Biskupice.

"The late Queen prophesied that it would be so," said the Pan of Taczew.

"Hah! Then perhaps we shall be obliged to go against Timur."

Here the conversation turned upon the Lithuanian expedition against the Tartars. There was no doubt that Prince Witold—that able commander being rather impetuous—had been badly defeated at Worskla, where a great number of the Lithuanian bojars and also some of the Polish knights were killed.

The knights who had now gathered in Amylej's house especially pitied Spytko of Mielsztyn, the greatest lord in the kingdom, who had gone with the expedition as a volunteer, and had been missed after the battle, lost no one knew where. They praised his chivalrous deed, and told how, having received from the commander of the enemy a protective kolpak,* he would not wear it during

* A high pointed hat, of fur or cloth.

the battle, preferring honourable death rather than life granted by the ruler of a heathen nation. But it was not yet known whether he had perished or was in captivity. If he were a prisoner, he could pay his ransom himself, for his riches were enormous, and he held in fief the whole of Podolia from King Wladyslaw.

But the defeat of Witold's army might prove ruinous to the whole of Jagiello's empire. No one knew when the Tartars, encouraged by their victory over Witold, might now invade the lands and cities belonging to the Grand Duchy. If such an invasion should occur, the kingdom of Poland would be involved in a war. Many knights, who like Zawisza, Farurej, Dobko, and even Powala, were accustomed to seek adventures in foreign countries, remained in Krakow, not knowing what might speedily happen. In case Tamerlane, who was the ruler of twenty-seven States, should stir up the whole Mongolian world to strife, then the peril to the kingdom would be great.

"If necessary," said one, "we will measure our swords with the Lame. With us it will not be such an easy matter as it was with those other nations which he conquered and exterminated. Moreover, the other Christian Princes will help us."

To this Zyndram of Maszkow, who especially hated the Teutonic Order, said bitterly :

"I do not know about the Princes ; but the Knights of the Cross are ready to become friends even with the Tartars, and attack us from the other side."

"Then we shall have a war!" exclaimed Zbyszko. "I am against the Knights of the Cross."

But the other knights contradicted Zyndram.

"The Knights of the Cross have no fear of God," they said ; "they seek only their own advantage, but they will not help the pagans against Christians. Moreover, Timur is now at war somewhere in Asia, and Edyga, the commander of the Tartars, lost so heavily in the battle that he is afraid even of victory. Prince Witold is a man full of expedients, and you may be sure he took precautions ; and even if the Lithuanians were not successful this time, it is at least no new thing for them to overcome the Tartars."

"We have to fight for life and death, not with the Tartars, but with the Germans," said Zyndram of Maszkow, "and if we do not crush them, our peril will come from them."

"And in the first place," he continued, turning towards Zbyszko, "Mazovia will perish. You will always find enough to do there, have no fear!"

"Hah! If my uncle were well, I would go there immediately."

"God help you!" said Powala, raising his glass. "Danusia's health, and yours!"

"To the destruction of the Germans!" added Zyndram of Maszkow.

They then began to bid each other farewell. At that moment one of the Princess's courtiers entered with a falcon on his arm, and, bowing to the knights who were present, turned with a peculiar smile to Zbyszko.

"The Princess wishes me to tell you," said he, "that she will stay in Krakow overnight, and will set out on the journey to-morrow."

"That is well," said Zbyszko. "But why? Is anyone sick?"

"No. But the Princess has a visitor from Mazovia."

"The Prince himself?"

"Not the Prince, but Jurand of Spychow," answered the courtier.

On hearing these words, Zbyszko grew greatly confused, and his heart began to throb, even as it did when the sentence of death was read to him.

CHAPTER X.

PRINCESS ANNA was not greatly surprised by the arrival of Jurand of Spychow. During his incessant frays with the neighbouring German knights, it frequently happened that a sudden longing for Danusia seized him. He would then appear unexpectedly in Warsaw, Ciechanow, or wherever the Court of Prince Janusz was situated for the time being.

Every time he saw the child his former grief burst forth anew, for Danusia resembled her mother. People thought his iron heart, filled with feelings of vengeance, would be softened by such grief. The Princess often tried to persuade him to abandon Spychow, and remain at the Court near Danusia. The Prince himself, appreciating his bravery and importance, and at the same time wishing to spare him the fatigue inevitable in the quarrels on the frontier, offered him the office of sword-bearer. It was in vain. The sight of Danusia re-opened the old wounds in his heart. In a few days he always lost his appetite, was unable to sleep, and became taciturn. Apparently his heart was bleeding, and at length he would disappear from the Court and return to the marshes of Spychow in order to drown his grief and anger in blood. Then people were wont to say: "Woe to the Germans! It is true they are not sheep; but they are sheep to Jurand, for he is a wolf to them." And before long news would arrive concerning volunteers who, going to join the Knights of the Cross, had been captured on their journey; concerning burned towns, captured peasants, or deadly fights, from which the terrible Jurand always emerged victorious. Even during perfect peace between the Prince of Mazovia and the Order continual fighting still went on near the frontier, caused by the rapacious disposition of the Mazovians and the German knights who held the land and strongholds from the Order. Even when cutting wood in the forests

or harvesting in the fields, the inhabitants carried their arms. The people there felt no certainty regarding the morrow, and were in continual readiness for war. In consequence, they became hardened. No one was content with defence alone; pillage was repaid with pillage, conflagration with conflagration, and invasion with invasion. It often happened that, while the Germans were stealing through the forest to attack some stronghold and seize the peasants or the cattle, at the same moment the Mazovians were doing likewise. Sometimes they met and fought, but often only the leaders challenged each other to mortal combat, after which the conqueror took captive the retinue of his defeated adversary. So, when complaints against Jurand were received at the Court of Warsaw, the Prince replied with complaints about the attacks made by the Germans. Thus both sides asked for justice, but neither was willing to grant it, and robberies, conflagrations, and invasions went unpunished.

But Jurand, dwelling in Spychow, surrounded by marshes overgrown with rushes, and filled with an unquenchable desire for vengeance, was so dreaded by his German neighbours that at length their fear became greater than their courage. The lands bordering upon Spychow lay fallow; the forests were overgrown with wild hops, and the meadows with reeds. Several German knights tried to settle in the neighbourhood of Spychow, but every one of them, after a time, preferred to abandon his estate held in fief, his herds, and his peasants, rather than live near this implacable man. Very often the knights planned a common expedition against Spychow, but these all ended in defeat. They tried different means. One time they brought from the province of Mein a knight noted for his strength and cruelty, who had always been victorious in battle. He challenged Jurand. But as soon as they entered the lists the German was so frightened at the sight of the dreadful Mazovian that he wheeled his horse about, intending to flee. Jurand thereupon pierced the other's defenceless back with a spear, and thus dishonoured him for ever. After this, even greater fear fell upon the neighbours, and if a German perceived, even from afar, the smoke of Spychow, he immediately crossed himself and began to pray to his patron in heaven. It was generally believed that

Jurand had sold his soul to the Evil One for the sake of vengeance.

Dreadful tales, moreover, were told about Spychow. It was said that the path leading to it through the quaggy, bottomless marshes overgrown with duckweed, was so narrow that two men on horseback could not ride abreast; that each side of the way was marked by German bones; and that during the night the heads of drowned men were seen walking on spiders' legs, howling, and drawing passing horsemen into the depths. It was said, too, that the gate of the grodek was ornamented with skeletons. While these stories were not true, yet in the barred pits dug beneath the house in Spychow there were always many prisoners groaning. In truth, Jurand's name was even more dreadful than the tales of skeletons and drowned men.

Zbyszko, having heard of Jurand's arrival, hastened to him, but with a certain uneasiness in his heart, because he was Danusia's father. Nobody could prevent him choosing Danusia as the lady of his thoughts, but since then the Princess had betrothed them. What would Jurand say to that? Would he consent? What would happen if he refused his consent? These questions filled Zbyszko's heart with fear, for he now cared for Danusia more than for anything else in the world. He was encouraged only by the thought that perhaps Jurand would praise him for having attacked Lichtenstein, inasmuch as he had done it to avenge Danusia's mother, and had, in consequence, nearly lost his own head. He began to question the courtier who had come to Amylej's house for him.

"Whither are you conducting me?" he asked; "to the castle?"

"Yes, to the castle. Jurand is with the Princess's Court."

"Tell me, what manner of man he is, so that I may know how to speak with him?"

"What can I tell you? He is a man quite different from other men. They say that he was mirthful before the blood in his heart was withered up with hate."

"Is he crafty?"

"He is cunning. He robs others, but he does not let others rob him. Hah! He has only one eye—the other was destroyed by a bolt from a German crossbow—but

with that he can look a man through and through. He loves no one except our lady the Princess, and he loves her because his wife was a lady from her Court, and now his daughter is with her."

Zbyszko sighed. "Then you think that he will not oppose the Princess's will?"

"I know what you would learn, and I will tell you what I have heard. The Princess has spoken to him about your betrothal, for it would not have been proper to conceal it from him, but it is not known what he said in reply."

While thus speaking, they arrived at the gate. The captain of the archers, the same who had conducted Zbyszko to the scaffold, now saluted them. After having passed the guards, they entered the courtyard and turned to the left, towards that part of the castle occupied by the Princess. The courtier, meeting a servant in the doorway, asked:

"Where is Jurand of Spychow?"

"In the room there, with his daughter," said the servant, pointing to the door.

Zbyszko crossed himself, raised the curtain over the doorway, and entered with a throbbing heart. But he did not perceive Jurand and Danusia at once, for the room was dark. But after a time he saw the fair head of the girl, who was sitting on her father's lap. They did not hear him as he entered. Pausing near the door, therefore, he said at length:

"May He be blessed!"

"For ever and ever!" answered Jurand, rising.

At that moment Danusia sprang towards the young knight, seized him with both hands, and cried out:

"Zbyszko! My father is here!"

Zbyszko kissed her hands; then, approaching Jurand, he said:

"I came to bow before you; you know who I am."

And he bent slightly, making a movement with his hands as if he wished to clasp Jurand by his knees. But Jurand grasped the young man's hand, turned him towards the light, and looked searchingly at him.

Zbyszko had already regained his self-possession, and he gazed with curiosity at Jurand. Before him he beheld a gigantic man with yellow hair and moustaches, his face pitted with smallpox, and lit by a single iron-grey eye.

It seemed to him as if this eye would pierce him, and he again became confused. Finally, not knowing what to say, but wishing to break the embarrassing silence, he asked:

"Then you are Jurand of Spychow, Danusia's father?"

But the other only pointed to an oaken bench standing beside the chair on which he sat, and continued to look at Zbyszko, who, becoming impatient, said:

"It is no pleasant matter for me to sit as though I were in court."

"You wished to fight with Lichtenstein?" Jurand said at last.

"Yes," answered Zbyszko.

A strange light shone in the eye of the Lord of Spychow, and his stern face gradually brightened.

"And was it for her?" he asked, looking at Danusia.

"For no other. My uncle has told you that I made a vow to her to tear three peacock plumes from German heads. But now there shall be not only three of them, but at least as many as I have fingers on both hands. In this way will I help you to avenge the death of Danusia's mother."

"Woe to them!" answered Jurand.

Then there was silence again. But Zbyszko, perceiving that, by showing his hatred of the Germans, he might capture Jurand's heart, said:

"I will not forgive them; they nearly caused my death."

Here he turned to Danusia and added:

"She saved me!"

"I know," said Jurand.

"Are you angry?"

"Since you have made a vow to her, you must serve her, for such is the knightly custom."

Zbyszko hesitated, but after a little he said, with evident uneasiness:

"Do you know that she covered my head with her veil? All the knights, and also the Franciscan who was with me holding the cross, heard her say 'He is mine!' Therefore, I will be loyal to her until death, so help me God!"

Having said this, he kneeled, and kissed both of Danusia's shoes with great reverence. Then he rose up, and, turning to Jurand, asked:

"Have you ever seen another as fair as she?"

Jurand suddenly put his hand behind his head, and, closing his eyes, said loudly:

"I have seen only one other, but the Germans killed her."

"Then listen!" said Zbyszko with enthusiasm. "We have suffered the same wrong; we will have the same vengeance. Those dogs also killed my people at Bogdaniec. You cannot find a better man for your work. It is no new thing to me. Ask my uncle. I can fight either with spear or axe, short sword or long. Did my uncle tell you about those Frisians? I will slaughter the Germans for you like sheep. And as for the girl, I vow to you on my knees that I will fight for her even with the Starosta* of Hell himself, and that I will give her up neither for lands nor for herds, nor for any other thing! Even if some one offered me a castle with glass windows, but without her, I would refuse it, and follow her to the end of the world!"

Jurand sat for a time with his head between his hands, but finally he awoke as from a dream, and said with sadness and grief:

"I like you, young man, but I cannot give her to you. She is not intended for you, poor lad!"

Zbyszko, hearing this, was dumb, and looked at Jurand with wondering eyes.

But Danusia came to his help. Zbyszko was dear to her, and she was pleased to be considered not a mere "shrub," but a grown girl. Moreover, she liked the betrothal and the dainties which her knight brought every day. So now, understanding that she was likely to lose all this, she slipped from her chair and, putting her head on her father's lap, began to cry:

"Tatulo! Tatulo!"†

He evidently loved her better than anything else in the world. He pressed his hand softly upon her head, while from his face all trace of deadly feud and anger disappeared; only sadness now remained.

"How is it?" asked Zbyszko, who had meanwhile recovered his composure. "Do you mean to oppose God's will?"

"If it be God's will," Jurand replied, "then you will

* Lord.

† A diminutive of endearment for "father."

get her. But I cannot give my consent. I should be glad to do it, but I cannot."

Having said this, he arose, embraced Danusia, and went towards the door. When Zbyszko endeavoured to detain him, he stopped for a moment.

"I shall not be angry with you for rendering her knightly service," he said as he passed out. "But do not ask me any questions, for I can tell you nothing."

CHAPTER XI.

NEXT day Jurand did not seek to avoid Zbyszko, nor did he prevent him from performing for Danusia, during the journey, those different services which he, as her knight, was bound to render her. On the contrary, Zbyszko observed that the gloomy Pan of Spychow regarded him kindly, as if regretting that he had been obliged to refuse his request. The young wloodyka tried several times to have some conversation with him. After they had set out from Krakow, there were many opportunities during the journey, for both accompanied the Princess on horseback; but as soon as Zbyszko endeavoured to learn something of the secret difficulties separating him from Danusia, the conversation suddenly closed. Jurand's face became gloomy, and he looked at Zbyszko uneasily, as if afraid lest he should betray himself. Zbyszko thought that perhaps the Princess knew what the obstacle was, so, having an opportunity of speaking to her privately, he inquired; but she could tell him nothing.

"Assuredly there is some secret," she said. "Jurand himself has told me so; but he begged me not to question him further, for he not only did not wish to tell what it was, but he could not. He must surely be bound by some oath, as so often happens among knights. But God will help us, and everything will yet turn out well."

"Without Danusia I shall be as unhappy as a chained dog or a bear in a ditch," answered Zbyszko. "For me there will be neither joy nor pleasure; nothing but sorrow and sighing. I will go against the Tartars with Prince Witold, and may they kill me there! But first, I must accompany my uncle to Bogdaniec, and then tear from German heads the peacock plumes, as I have sworn. Perhaps the Germans will kill me; but I prefer such a death rather than live and see some one else possess Danusia."

The Princess looked at him with her kind blue eyes, and asked him, with a certain degree of astonishment:

"Then you would permit it?" she asked.

"I? As long as I have breath in my nostrils that shall never happen, unless my hand be paralysed, and I be unable to hold an axe! But how can I take her against her father's will?"

In reply, the Princess said, as if speaking to herself:

"Does it not happen in that fashion sometimes?"

Then to Zbyszko she said:

"God's will is stronger than a father's will. What did Jurand say to you? To me he said, 'If it be God's will, then he will get her.'"

"He said the same to me!" exclaimed Zbyszko. "That is my only consolation, Gracious Lady."

"I will help you, and you may be sure of Danusia's constancy. Only yesterday I said to her: 'Danusia, will you always love Zbyszko?' And she answered: 'I will be Zbyszko's, and no one else's.' She is still a green berry, but when she promises anything, she keeps her word, for she is the daughter of a knight. Her mother was like her."

"Thank God!" said Zbyszko.

"Only, remember to be faithful to her, for man is inconstant. He promises to love one faithfully, and afterwards he promises the same to another."

"May the Lord Jesus punish me if I prove such!" exclaimed Zbyszko earnestly.

"Well, remember! And after you have conveyed your uncle to Bogdaniec, come to our Court. There will be some opportunity there for you to win your spurs. Then we shall see what can be done. In the meantime, Danusia will grow, and she will feel God's will. Although she loves you deeply even now, it is not the love a woman feels. Perhaps Jurand will give his consent, for I see he likes you. You can go to Spychow, and thence you can go with Jurand against the Germans. It may happen that you will be able to render him some great service, and thus gain his affection."

"Gracious Princess, I have thought likewise; but with your sanction it will be easier."

This conversation cheered Zbyszko. But, at the first halting-place, old Macko became worse, and it was necessary to remain until he became better. The good Princess

Anna Danuta left him all the medicine she had with her; but she herself was obliged to continue her journey, so both the Wlodykas of Bogdaniec bade those belonging to the Mazovian Court farewell. Zbyszko prostrated himself at the Princess's feet, and then at Danusia's. He promised her once more to be faithful, and to meet her soon at Ciechanow or at Warsaw. At last, he seized her in his strong arms, and, raising her, he exclaimed in a voice full of emotion:

"Remember me, my sweetest flower! Remember me, my little goldfish!"

Danusia embraced him as though he were a beloved brother, put her cheek to his face and wept freely.

"I do not want to go to Ciechanow without Zbyszko!" she cried. "I do not want to go to Ciechanow!"

Jurand saw her grief, but he was not angry. On the contrary, he bade the young man farewell kindly. After he had mounted, he turned towards him once more.

"God be with you!" he said. "Do not bear ill-will towards me."

"How should I feel ill-will towards you, who are Danusia's father?" answered Zbyszko warmly. Then he bent to his stirrup, and the old man shook him by the hand.

"May God help you in everything!" he said. "Farewell!"

He then rode away. But Zbyszko understood by his last words that he wished him success; and when he returned to the waggon on which Macko was lying, he said:

"I believe he is willing, but something hinders him from giving his consent. You were in Spychow; you have wisdom; can not you guess what it is?"

But Macko was too sick. The fever increased so much towards evening that he became delirious. Instead of answering Zbyszko, he looked at him as if he were astonished.

"Why do they ring the bells?" he asked.

Zbyszko was frightened. He feared that if the sick man heard the sound of bells it must be a sign that death was at hand. He feared also lest the old man might die without a priest and without confession, and go, if not to Hell, then, at least, for long centuries to purgatory. He therefore determined to resume the journey, in order

to reach as soon as possible some parish in which Macko might receive the last sacraments.

They therefore set out and travelled during the night. Zbyszko sat in the waggon on the hay beside the sick man, and watched by him until daybreak. From time to time he gave him wine to drink, and Macko drank it eagerly, for it relieved him greatly. After the second quart he recovered from his delirium, and after the third he fell asleep. He slept so well that Zbyszko bent towards him at intervals to ascertain if he were still alive.

Until the time of his imprisonment in Krakow, he had not realised how dearly he loved this uncle, who, for him, replaced both father and mother. But now he realised it well, and he felt that, after his uncle's death, life would be very lonely without relatives except the abbot who held Bogdaniec in pledge, without friends, without any one to help him. The thought came to him that, if Macko died, that would be but one more reason for wreaking vengeance on the Germans.

"In this whole kingdom," he said to himself, "there is no man who has not suffered some wrong from them, and who would not avenge his wrong?" Here he remembered the Germans with whom he had fought at Wilno, and he knew that even the Tartars were less cruel.

The approach of dawn interrupted his thoughts. The day was bright, but cold. Evidently, Macko was better, for he was breathing more regularly and quietly. He did not awake until the sun was quite warm; then he opened his eyes and said:

"I am better. Where are we?"

"We are approaching Olkus—you remember, where they mine the silver."

"If we could get what is in the earth here, then we might rebuild Bogdaniec!"

"I see you are better," answered Zbyszko, laughing. Ha! ha! There would be enough even for a stone castle! We shall go to the parish church, for there the priests will offer us hospitality, and you will be able to make your confession. Everything is in God's hands; but it is better to have one's conscience clear."

"I am a sinner, and would willingly repent," answered Macko. "I dreamt last night that the devils were tearing my skin off. They were talking German. Thanks be to God that I am better. Have you slept at all?"

"How could I sleep when I was watching you?"

"Then lie down for a little while. When we arrive I will awaken you."

"I cannot sleep!"

"What prevents you?"

"What else should it be," said Zbyszko, looking at his uncle, "if not love? I am sore at heart; but I will ride on horseback for a while—that will help me."

He got down from the waggon and mounted the horse which his servant brought for him. Meanwhile, Macko touched his sore side, but he was evidently thinking about something else and not about his sickness, for he tossed his head, smacked his lips, and finally said:

"I wonder and wonder, and cannot wonder enough, why you are so eager for love. Your father was not like that, nor am I."

But Zbyszko, instead of answering, straightened himself on the saddle, placed his hands on his hips, tossed his head, and sang:

From morn till eve for my love I sigh,
For my love and the light of her light-blue eyes;
My tears fall fast, for she is not nigh,
And my heart for the love of my darling cries.

"Halloo!" he shouted.

The "halloo!" resounded through the forest, reverberating among the trunks of the trees, and finally re-echoing in the far distance before being lost in the thickets. Again Macko felt his side in which the German spear-head had lodged, and said, moaning a little:

"In the old days men were wiser!"

Then he became thoughtful, as if recalling old times.

"Although even then," he added, "some of them were foolish also."

They now emerged from the forest, behind which they perceived the miners' sheds, and, in the distance, the walls built by King Kazimierz, and the tower of the church erected by Wladyslaw Lokietek.

The canon of the church heard Macko's confession, and offered them hospitality. They remained there overnight, and set out again next morning. Beyond Olkus they turned towards Szlonsk, as they proposed riding towards Great Poland along its boundaries. The road ran through a great forest, in which, towards sunset, there was heard the growling of the bear and the bellowing of the bison,

while during the night the eyes of the wolves were seen shining behind the thick hazelnut trees. But the greatest danger which threatened the traveller on this road was from the Germans and the Germanised knights of Szlonsk, whose castles were erected here and there along the boundaries. It is true that, in consequence of the war with Naderspraw the Opolczyk, whom the Silesians were helping against King Wladyslaw, the majority of these castles had been destroyed by Polish hands, but it was necessary to be watchful, especially after sunset, and to have one's weapons ready. They rode so quietly, however, that Zbyszko felt the journey tedious. When they were about one day's journey from Bogdaniec they heard the snorting and trampling of horses behind them.

"Some people are following us," said Zbyszko.

Macko, who was awake, looked at the stars like an experienced traveller, and answered :

"Daybreak is near. Robbers do not attack towards the end of the night."

Zbyszko stopped the waggon, however, placed his men across the road facing the advancing horses, and waited.

After a time, he perceived in the dusk several horsemen. One of them was riding ahead, and it was evident that he had no wish to hide, for he was singing. Zbyszko could not hear the words of the song, but the gay "Tra-la-la!" with which the stranger ended each refrain reached his ears.

"Our people!" he said to himself.

"Stop!" he called, after a short pause.

"And you still sit!" answered a merry voice.

"Who are you?"

"And you?"

"Why do you follow us?"

"And why do you bar the road?"

"Answer! Our crossbows are bent."

"And our—stretched—aimed!"

"Answer like a man, otherwise woe to you!"

Only a merry song, however, came back in answer to Zbyszko :

Would you drive all care away,
Sing and dance the livelong day !
Tra-la-la !

Dance and sing—sing while you may,
Thus you'll drive all care away !
Tra-la-la ! Tra-la-la !

Zbyszko was naturally amazed at such an answer. Presently, the song stopped, and the same voice asked:

"And how is the old man Macko? Does he still breathe?"

"For God's sake!" said Macko, rising in the waggon. "They are some of our people!"

Zbyszko rushed forward.

"Who asks about Macko?" he exclaimed.

"A neighbour. Zych of Zgorzelice. I have looked for you for a week, and inquired about you from all on the road."

"Rety! Uncle! Zych of Zgorzelice is here!" shouted Zbyszko.

They began to greet each other joyfully, for Zych was really their neighbour, and a good man besides, one of whom every one was very fond on account of his mirth.

"Well, how are you?" asked he, shaking hands with Macko. "Still 'Tra-la-la!' or 'Tra-la-la!' no longer?"

"Ah, no longer 'Tra-la-la!'" answered Macko. "But I see you gladly. Gracious God, it is as if I were already in Bogdaniec."

"What ails you? I heard that the Germans had wounded you."

"They did, the dogs! A spear-head stuck between my ribs."

"For that," said Zbyszko, "everybody advises the grease of a bear. As soon as we reach Bogdaniec, I will go with an axe to the hives."

"Perhaps Jagienka has some."

"What Jagienka? Your wife's name was Malgochna," said Macko.

"Oh, Malgochna is no more! It will be three years on St. Michael's Day since Malgochna was buried in the priests' field. She was a sturdy woman! May the Lord make His face shine upon her soul. Jagienka is exactly like her, only younger.

"Behind the hill, a ravine wild;
As the mother, so the child!
Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la!"

"I told Malgochna not to climb the pine tree, because she was no longer young. But she would climb it. The branch broke, she fell and was badly hurt. Within three days she died."

"Lord, make Thy face shine upon her soul!" said Macko. "I remember, I remember! When she was angry, the farm boys used to hide in the hay. But she was clever. Ah! So she fell from a pine tree!"

"She dropped like a cone. Do you know, after the funeral I was so stupefied with grief that for three days they could not rouse me. They thought I was dead. Afterwards I wept for a long time. But Jagienka, too, is clever. She takes care of everything."

"I scarcely remember her. She was not as tall as the helve of an axe when I went away. She could pass under a horse without touching its body. Ah, that is a long time ago, and she must have grown!"

"She was fifteen on St. Agnes's Day. But I have not seen her for more than a year."

"Why have you not seen her? Where have you been?"

"At the war. I do not need to stay at home. Jagienka takes care of everything."

Macko, although ill, began to listen attentively when war was mentioned.

"Perhaps you were with Prince Witold at Worskla?" he asked.

"Yes, I was there," answered Zych of Zgorzelice gaily. "Well, the Lord God did not send him good fortune. We were terribly defeated by Edyga. First they killed our horses. A Tartar will not attack openly like a Christian knight, but shoots his arrows from afar. You attack him and he flees, and then again hurls his arrows. What can you do with such a man? In our army the knights used to boast: 'We do not need to lower our spears or draw our swords; we will crush the vermin under our horses' feet.' So they boasted, I say; but when the arrows began to hiss, their number darkened the sky, and the battle was soon over. Hardly one out of ten lived. Would you believe it? More than half of the army was slain! Seventy Lithuanian and Russian princes lay dead on the battlefield; and in two weeks' time one could not number the bojars and other courtiers, whom they call otroks, that were killed."

"I heard of it," interrupted Macko. "Many of our knights perished also."

"Pshaw! Even ten Knights of the Cross were killed, for they were obliged to serve in Witold's army. Many

of our people perished; they never run away. Prince Witold had the greatest confidence in our knights, and he chose a guard of them around him during the battle—all Poles. There was great havoc among them, but he was not touched. Pan Spytko of Mielsztyn was killed; also the sword-bearer, Bernat, Judge Mikolaj, Prokop, Przeclaw, Dobrogost, Jasko of Lazewice, Pilik the Mazovian, Warsz of Michow, the Palatine Socha, Jasko of Dumbrowa, Pietrko of Miloslaw, Szczepiecki, Oderski, and Tomko Lagoda. Who can enumerate them? Some of them were struck by so many arrows that they looked like porcupines. It was fearful to look at them!"

Here he laughed, as if he were telling a most amusing story, and then began to sing:

A Tartar you will know one day,
When he beats you and runs away!

"Well, and what then?" asked Zbyszko.

"The Grand Duke escaped, but he was as courageous as ever. The more you press him, the farther he jumps, like a hazelnut stick. We rushed to the Tavianian ford to defend those who were crossing over. There were with us a few knights from Poland. The second day, Edyga came with a swarm of Tartars, but he could do nothing. Hah! When he wished to pass the ford, we fought him so hard that he could not. We killed and caught many of them. I myself caught five Tartars, and I sent them to Zgorzelice. You will see what dog's heads they have."

"In Krakow," said Macko, "they say that the war may reach Poland also."

"Do you think Edyga a fool? He knows well what kind of knights we have; and he also knows that the greatest knights remained at home, because the Queen was not pleased when Witold began the war on his own authority. Ah, he is cunning, that old Edyga! He understood at Tavia that the Prince's army had increased, and had gone far beyond the tenth-land!"

"But you returned?"

"Yes, I returned. There is nothing to do there. In Krakow I heard about you, and that you had started a little ahead of me."

Here he turned to Zbyszko.

"Hah, my lord!" said he, "the last time I saw you, you were a small boy; and now, although there is no light, I suppose you are as big as a urus. And you had

your crossbows ready! One can see you have been to the war."

"War has nurtured me since childhood. Let my uncle tell you if I am lacking in experience."

"It is not necessary for your uncle to tell me anything. In Krakow I saw the Pan of Taczew, and he told me about you. But I understand that the Mazovian does not want to give you his daughter. I have nothing against you; I like you. You will forget about that damsel when you see my Jagienka. She is a wonder!"

"I shall not forget her, even if I see ten such as your Jagienka."

"She will have the estate of Moczydoly for her dowry. Many will ask me for my Jagna, do not fear!"

Zbyszko was about to answer: "But not I!" but Zych of Zgorzelice began to sing:

On bended knee her hand I'll ask,
And you will not refuse me;
No, you will not refuse!

"You are always merry and full of song," said Macko.

"Well, and what do the blessed do in heaven?"

"They sing."

"Well, then! And the damned cry. I prefer to go to those who sing rather than to those who cry. St. Peter will say, 'We must let him into Paradise, otherwise he will sing in Hell, and that would never do.' Look, the day breaks!"

The day was, indeed, breaking. They soon reached a valley, where some men were fishing in a small lake. On seeing the armed travellers, they left their nets and immediately seized their picks and staffs, and stood ready for battle.

"They think that we are robbers," said Zych, laughing. "Ho, fishermen! To whom do you belong?"

They stood silent, looking on distrustfully; but finally one of them, recognising that the horsemen were knights, answered:

"To the abbot of Tulcza."

"Our relative," said Macko. "The same who holds Bogdaniec in pledge. These must be his forests; but he must have purchased them recently."

"He did not buy them," answered Zych. "He fought for them with Wilk of Brzozowa, and it seems that the abbot defeated Wilk. A year ago they were going to

fight on horseback with spears and long swords for this part of the forest; but I do not know how it ended, for I went away."

"Well, we are relatives," said Macko. "He will not quarrel with us."

"Perhaps. He is a chivalrous abbot who knows how to wear a helm; he is pious also, and sings mass beautifully. Do not you remember? When he cries out at mass the swallows, nestling under the ceiling, fall from their nests. In that way God's glory increases."

"Certainly, I remember! At ten paces he could blow the candles out at the altar. Has he been in Bogdaniec?"

"Yes, he was there. He settled five peasants on the land. He has also been at my house at Zgorzelice, for, as you know, he baptized Jagienka, of whom he is very fond, calling her his little daughter."

"God will bless him, if he be willing to leave me the peasants," said Macko.

"Ha-ha! What do five peasants amount to? Jagienka will ask him, and he will not refuse her."

Here the conversation stopped for a time. Over the dark forest and the pink downs the bright rays of the rising sun now threw a cheery radiance. The knights greeted it with the customary "May it be blessed!" then, having made the sign of the cross, they began their morning prayers. Zych finished first, and said to his companions:

"I hope to see you well soon. Ah, you have both changed! You, Macko, must regain your health. Jagienka will take care of you, for there is no woman in your house. One can see that you have a piece of iron between your ribs."

Here he turned toward Zbyszko.

"Show yourself also. Mighty God! I remember you when you were small, and used to climb on the colts by their tails; and now, what a knight! Your face looks like that of a little lord, but your body like that of a sturdy man. A fellow like you might wrestle with a bear."

"A bear is nothing to him!" said Macko. "He was younger than he is to-day when that Frisian called him a beardless youth, and he, resenting it, immediately pulled out the fellow's moustache."

"I know," interrupted Zych, "and you fought after-

wards, and captured their retinue. The Pan of Taczew told me all about it:

“A German bold came proudly by;
With broken head he soon did lie!
Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la!”

Zbyszko wondered at Zych's long thin figure, at his thin face, with its enormous nose, and at his laughing round eyes.

“Oh!” said he, “with such a neighbour there will be no sadness, if God will but restore my uncle's health.”

“It is good to have a merry neighbour, for with a jolly fellow there will be no quarrel,” answered Zych. “Now, listen to what I say. You have been long away from home, and you will not find much comfort in Bogdaniec. You had better come with me to Zgorzelice. I shall be glad to have you stay a month or two. During that time Jagienka will take care of Bogdaniec. Rely on her, and do not trouble yourselves with anything. Zbyszko can go there from time to time to oversee the farming; I shall bring the abbot to Zgorzelice, and you can settle your account with him. The girl will take good care of you, as of a father, and in illness a woman's care is the best. Well, my dear friends, will you do as I ask you?”

“We know that you are a good man—you always were,” answered Macko with emotion; “but, do not you see, if I must die of this wound, I prefer to die in my own house. If God orders me to the other world, well, then I cannot help it! I cannot escape, even with better care. As for inconvenience, we are accustomed to that in the wars. Even a bunch of straw is pleasant to one who has slept on nothing but the bare ground for years. But I thank you for your kind heart, and if I be not able to show you my gratitude, God will permit Zbyszko to do so.”

Zych of Zgorzelice, who was noted for his kind heart and readiness to perform a favour, began to insist, but Macko was firm. “If I must die,” said he, “it is best that I die in my own courtyard!”

For several years he had longed to see Bogdaniec, so now, when he was so near it, he felt that he must go there, even if it were his last night. God was merciful, having permitted him, who was so ill, to come so far. He brushed away the tears that gathered under his eyelids, looked round about, and said:

"If these are the woods of Wilk of Brzozowa we shall reach home this afternoon."

"They do not belong to Wilk of Brzozowa any longer, but to the abbot," said Zych.

"If they belong to the abbot," said Macko, with a smile, "then some time they may belong to us."

"Ha-ha! A while ago you were talking about death," said Zych joyfully, "and now you wish to outlive the abbot."

"No, I shall not outlive him; but Zbyszko may."

Further conversation was interrupted by the sound of horns in the forest. Zych stopped his horse, and began to listen.

"Some one is hunting," said he. "Wait!"

"Perhaps it is the abbot. It would be pleasant to meet him here."

"Be still!"

Here he turned to his retinue.

"Stop!"

They halted. The horns sounded nearer, and soon afterwards the baying of dogs was heard.

"Stop!" repeated Zych. "They are coming towards us."

Zbyszko leaped from his horse and exclaimed:

"Give me the crossbow! The beast may attack us! Hasten! hasten!"

Seizing the crossbow from the servant's hands, he rested it against the ground, pressed it against his body, bent and stretched his back like a bow, and seizing the string with the fingers of both hands, he pulled it on to the iron hook. Then, placing an arrow, he sprang into the woods.

"He stretched it without the crank!" whispered Zych, astonished at such great strength.

"Ho, he is a strong lad!" answered Macko proudly.

Meanwhile, the sound of the horns and the barking of the dogs came nearer. Suddenly, from the right of the forest came the sound of heavy trampling, accompanied by the crackling of broken branches and bushes, and out of the thicket rushed an old bearded urus, with bloody eyes and panting tongue, his gigantic head lowered, looking breathless and terrible. Coming to a small ravine, the brute leaped it, but fell on his knees. He was up again immediately, and, in a moment, would have dis-

appeared in the thicket on the other side of the road, but the string of the crossbow twanged, the whistling of the arrow resounded, the beast reared, turned, roared terribly, and fell on the ground as if struck by a thunderbolt.

Zbyszko leaped from behind a tree, again stretched the crossbow, and approached the bull, which was pawing the ground with its hind feet. He turned towards the retinue, and, glancing at the animal, cried:

"I have hit him. He is badly wounded!"

"You are a strong boy!" said Zych, riding up to him. "With only one arrow!"

"Pshaw! it was near, and the speed was great. Come and see; not only the iron, but even the shaft has disappeared under the left shoulder-blade."

"The huntsmen must be near; they will claim the beast."

"I will not give it them!" answered Zbyszko. "It was killed on the road, and the road is not private property."

"But if it belongs to the abbot?"

"Well, he may have it."

Several dogs now burst from the forest and rushed at the bull.

"Soon the huntsmen will appear," said Zych. "Look! There they are, but they do not see the beast yet. Stop, stop! Here, here! Killed, killed!"

Then he became silent, and sheltered his eyes with one hand.

"For God's sake!" he exclaimed after a moment's pause; "what has happened? Have I become blind, or is it only seeming?"

"There is some one on a black horse in the front," said Zbyszko.

"Dear Jesus!" exclaimed Zych; "it must be Jagienka! Jagna, Jagna!" he called, rushing forward.

Before they had time to put their horses to the gallop Zbyszko beheld a strange spectacle. He saw a girl sitting like a man on a black horse, riding swiftly towards them. She had a crossbow in one hand, and a boar-spear across her shoulders. Her floating hair was full of hop strobiles; her face was bright as the dawn. Her hunting shirt lay open over her bosom, and she wore a serdak.* She reined in her horse as she reached them, and her face

* A kind of sheepskin coat without sleeves.

seemed moved by emotions of surprise, hesitation, and joy. At length, scarcely able to believe her own eyes, she began to cry in a childish voice:

"Tatulo, tatulo! Dearest!"

In the twinkling of an eye she leaped from her horse, while Zych, too, dismounted to welcome her. She threw her arms about his neck. For a long time Zbyszko heard only the sounds of kisses and these two words: "Tatulo! Jagula! Tatulo! Jagula!" repeated in tones of joy.

The two retinues now approached, and Macko arrived also; but the father and daughter continued to repeat: "Tatulo! Jagula!" and still kissed each other. At last Jagienka asked:

"Then you have decided to come home from the war? Are you well?"

"Yes, to come home. Why should I not be well? And you? And the boys? Are they well also? Yes, otherwise you would not run about the forest. But, my girl, what are you doing here?"

"Don't you see that I am hunting?" answered Jagienka, laughing.

"In some one else's woods?"

"The abbot gave me permission. He even sent me experienced huntsmen and a pack of hounds."

Here she turned to the servants.

"Chase the dogs away," she cried, "they will tear the skin!"

Then to Zych:

"Oh, how glad I am to see you!" And they again kissed each other.

"We are far from home," she continued; "we followed the beast. I am sure it must be more than ten miles; the horses are exhausted. What a great urus! Did you see? He must have at least three of my arrows in him; the last one killed him."

"He was killed by the last, but it was not yours. This knight killed him."

Jagienka threw her hair back and looked at Zbyszko sharply, but in no very friendly fashion.

"Do you know who he is?" asked Zych.

"I do not know."

"No wonder you do not recognise him; he has grown. Perhaps you will recognise old Macko of Bogdaniec."

"For God's sake! Is that Macko of Bogdaniec?" exclaimed Jagienka

Having approached the waggon, she kissed Macko's hand.

"It is you?"

"Yes, it is I; but I am obliged to ride in the waggon, for I have been wounded by the Germans."

"What Germans? The war was with the Tartars!"

"There was a war with the Tartars, but we were not in that war; we fought in the war in Lithuania, Zbyszko and I."

"Where is Zbyszko?"

"Then you did not recognise Zbyszko?" said Macko, smiling.

"Is that man Zbyszko?" exclaimed the girl, looking again at the young knight.

"Yes, it is he."

"You must give him a kiss, because he is an old acquaintance of yours," said Zych mirthfully.

Jagienka turned gaily towards Zbyszko, but suddenly retreated, and, covering her eyes with her hand, she said:

"I am timid."

"But we have known each other since we were children," said Zbyszko.

"Aha! We know each other well. I remember when you paid us a visit with Macko about eight years ago, and my matula* gave us some nuts, with honey. You, being the elder, struck me with your fist, and then ate all the nuts yourself."

"He will not act in that fashion now!" said Macko.

"He has been with Prince Witold, and with the Court in Krakow, and he has learned courtly manners."

But Jagienka was now thinking of something else. Turning towards Zbyszko, she asked:

"Then it was you who killed the urus?"

"Yes."

"We must see where the arrow is."

"You cannot see it; it disappeared under the shoulder-blade."

"Be silent; do not dispute," said Zych. "We all saw him shoot the urus, and we saw something still better. He bent the bow without the crank."

Jagienka looked at Zbyszko for the third time, but now with astonishment.

* A diminutive of endearment for "mother."

“You bent the crossbow without the crank?”

Zbyszko, detecting some doubt in her voice, rested the crossbow on the ground, and bent it again in the twinkling of an eye. Then, wishing to show that he was familiar with the customs of chivalry, he kneeled on one knee and handed the bow to Jagi nka. But the girl, instead of taking it from his hands, suddenly blushed—why, she could not tell—and began to fasten the shirt, which, during her swift ride, had been thrown open on her bosom.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next day after their arrival at Bogdaniec, Macko and Zbyszko made an inspection of their old home, and soon realised that Zych of Zgorzelice was right when he told them that at first they would not be comfortable.

With the farming they found they could manage well enough, for there were several fields cultivated by the peasants whom the abbot had settled there. Formerly, there had been much cultivated land in Bogdaniec, but after the battle at Plowce, where the family of Grady had perished, there was a scarcity of working hands. Since the invasion of the Germans from Szlonsk and the war of the Nalenczs with the Grzymalits, the rich fields had become overgrown with trees. Macko could not prevent this. For several years he had tried to bring farmers from Krzesnia, to rent the land to them, but they refused to come, preferring to remain on their own strips of land rather than cultivate another's. His offer, however, attracted a few homeless men, and in the wars he captured several slaves, who settled in the houses and married, and thus he populated the village. But it was great labour, and as soon as he had an opportunity, Macko pledged the whole of Bogdaniec, thinking that it would be easy for the powerful abbot to settle peasants on the land, while the war would bring Zbyszko and himself both men and money. The abbot, indeed, was energetic. He increased the working force of Bogdaniec by five peasant families; he added to the stock of cattle and horses; he then built a barn, a stable, and a cow-house. But as he did not himself live in Bogdaniec, he did not repair the house.

It contained an enormous hall, two large rooms with alcoves, and a kitchen. In the rooms there were windows made of bladders, and in the centre of each room there was a fireplace made of limestone, from which the smoke

escaped through a hole in the ceiling. From the ceilings, now blackened with smoke, there used to hang in former times the hams of boars, bears, and deer, rumps of roes, sides of beef, and rolls of sausages. The hooks were now empty, as well as the shelves fastened to the walls which used to support the tin and earthen dishes. The walls beneath the shelves, however, were no longer bare, for Zbyszko had ordered his servants to hang the helms, cuirasses, long swords, and short swords on them, and further along boar-spears and forks, caparisons and saddles. The smoke blackened the weapons, and it was necessary to clean them very often; but Macko, who was a careful man, ordered the servants to place the costlier clothing in the alcove in which his bed stood.

In the front room, near the windows, stood pine tables and benches, on which the lords sat during meals, with all their servants. Men accustomed to war are by no means dainty, but in Bogdaniec there was no bread, flour, or dishes. The peasants brought what they could, and Macko expected that the neighbours, as was then customary, would help him. Nor was he mistaken, so far, at least, as Zych of Zgorzelice was concerned.

The second day, when the old wloDYka was sitting on a log in front of the house enjoying the bright autumn day, Jagienka appeared, riding a black horse. She dismounted and approached Macko, out of breath with fast riding, and looking as rosy as an apple.

"May you be blessed!" said she. "Tatulo sent me to inquire about your health."

"I am no worse," answered Macko; "and I have, at least, slept in my own house."

"But you cannot be comfortable here, and a sick person needs care."

"We are hardy folk. It is true that at first we had no comfort, but we were not hungry. We ordered an ox and two sheep to be killed, so there is now plenty of meat. The women brought some flour and eggs. The worst thing is that we have no dishes."

"Well, I have ordered my servants to load two waggons. In one there are two beds and dishes, and in the other provisions. There are cakes and flour, salt pork and dried mushrooms; there is a barrel of beer and another of mead—indeed, a little of everything we had in the house."

Macko, who was most grateful for this kindness, caressed Jagienka's head.

"May God reward your father and yourself," he said. "When our housekeeping is in order, we will return the provisions."

"How clever you are!" answered the girl. "We are not like the Germans, who take back what they give."

"Well so much the more may God reward you! Your father told us what a good housekeeper you are, and that you had taken care of Zgorzelice the whole year."

"Yes," she answered. "If you should need anything else, you have only to send some one."

Here Jagienka looked round about; and Macko, observing this, smiled and asked:

"For whom are you looking?"

"I am looking for no one!"

"I will send Zbyszko to thank you and your father. Do you like Zbyszko?"

"I have not looked at him."

"Then look at him now, for he is now coming."

As he spoke, Zbyszko came from the stable. He wore a reindeer jacket and a round felt cap, like that worn beneath a helm; his hair was without a net, cut evenly over his eyebrows, and hanging in golden curls over his shoulders. He walked swiftly, for he had seen the girl. He was tall and graceful, and looked like the shield-bearer of a rich nobleman.

Jagienka turned towards Macko, as if to show that she had come only to see him; but Zbyszko welcomed her joyfully, and, taking her hand, raised it to his lips, despite her resistance.

"Why do you kiss my hand?" she asked. "Am I a priest?"

"Such is the custom. You must not resist."

"Even if he had kissed both your hands," said Macko, "it would not be enough for all that you have brought us."

"What have you brought?" asked Zbyszko, looking round the courtyard. He did not, however, see anything except the black horse tied to the post.

"The waggons have not yet come," answered Jagienka; "but they will soon be here."

Macko began to enumerate the things she had brought; but when he mentioned the two beds, Zbyszko said:

"I am content to sleep on the urus's skin, but I thank you for thinking of me also."

"It was not I, it was tatulo," answered the girl, blushing. "If you prefer to sleep on the skin, you can do so."

"I prefer to sleep on what I can. Sometimes, after a battle, I have slept with a dead Krzyzak for a pillow."

"You do not mean to tell me that you have ever killed a Knight of the Cross? I am sure you have not."

Instead of answering, Zbyszko began to laugh.

"For heaven's sake, girl," exclaimed Macko, "you do not know him yet! He has never done anything else but kill Germans. In Krakow, he went near killing Lichtenstein, the envoy, and for that he barely escaped execution. Such a fellow is he! I will tell you also about the two Frisians, from whom we took their retinues and so much rich booty that one could redeem Bogdaniec with the half of it."

Here Macko began to tell about his combat with the Frisians, and other adventures in which they had been engaged; how, living in foreign lands, they had fought from behind walls and in the open fields with the most famous knights; how they had fought Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Burgundians. He also told her of the wonders they had seen—of German castles of red brick, Lithuanian castles of wood, churches more beautiful than one could see near Bogdaniec, great cities, and that dreadful wilderness, in which the Lithuanian gods cried throughout the night, and of many other marvellous things. And everywhere, in every fight, he said, Zbyszko had been victorious, so that even the greatest knights were astonished.

Jagienka, who was sitting on the log by Macko's side, listened to the narrative with open mouth, raising her head from time to time to look at the young knight with ever-increasing admiration and amazement. At length, when Macko had finished, she sighed and said:

"I am sorry I was not born a boy!"

But Zbyszko, who had been looking at her attentively during the recital, was apparently thinking of something else, for he suddenly said:

"What a beautiful girl you have grown!"

Jagienka answered, half in displeasure and half in sadness:

"You have seen many more beautiful than I am."

But Zbyszko could truly answer her that he had not

seen many as pretty as she, for Jagienka was radiant with health, youth, and strength. Everything about her was beautiful—her slender figure, her broad bosom that looked as if it were cut out of marble, her ruby mouth and intelligent blue eyes. She was now dressed with more care than when in the forest with the hunting party. About her neck she had a necklace of red beads; she wore a fur jacket, opening in front and embroidered with green cloth, a homespun skirt and new footgear. Even old Macko observed this beautiful attire, and, looking at her for a moment, he asked:

“Why are you dressed as if you were going to church?”

But instead of answering, she suddenly exclaimed:

“There! The waggons are coming!”

The waggons, in fact, appeared, and she hastened towards them, followed by Zbyszko. The unloading took a long time, to the great satisfaction of Macko, who looked on at everything, praising Jagienka all the time. It was dusk when the girl started homewards. As she was getting ready to mount her horse, Zbyszko suddenly caught hold of her, and, before she was able to say a word, had lifted her into the saddle. She blushed like the dawn, and, turning her head towards him, said with a trembling voice:

“How strong you are!”

But he, not observing her confusion and her blushes in the dusk, laughed and said:

“Are you not afraid of wild beasts? It is night.”

“There is a boar-spear in the waggon. Give it to me.”

Zbyszko went to the waggon, took the boar-spear, and handed it to Jagienka.

“Be in good health!” he said.

“Be in good health!” she answered.

“May God reward you! To-morrow, or the day after, I shall be in Zgorzelice to thank Zych and yourself for your kindness.”

“Come! You will be welcome!”

She touched her horse and disappeared among the bushes which grew by the roadside.

Zbyszko returned to his uncle.

“You must go indoors,” he said.

But Macko answered, without moving from the log:

“Hah! What a girl! Did she not make the courtyard brighter?”

"That is true!"

There was a moment of silence. Macko seemed to be thinking of something while looking at the stars. Then, as if speaking to himself, he said:

"She is pretty, and a good housekeeper, although she is no more than fifteen years old."

"Yes!" answered Zbyszko. "Old Zych loves her dearly."

"He said that the estate of Moczydoly will be her dowry," Macko continued, "and there is a herd of mares with many colts on the pastures."

"Are there not a great many marshes on the Moczydoly estate?"

"Yes, and in those marshes there are plenty of beavers."

There was again silence. Macko looked intently at Zbyszko for a while.

"Of what are you thinking?" he asked at length.

"The sight of Jagienka has reminded me of Danusia, and something pricks me in the heart."

"Let us go into the house," answered the old wloodyka. "It is getting late." And, rising with difficulty, he leaned on Zbyszko, who conducted him to the alcove.

Next day, at the urgent desire of Macko, Zbyszko went to Zgorzelice. He went, attired as if for a wedding, in his jaka of white satin, bordered with gold fringe and embroidered with golden griffins. Zych received him with open arms, and showed his pleasure by singing. As for Jagienka, when she entered she stopped as if rooted to the ground, and almost dropped the bucket of wine she was carrying, for she thought that some king's son had arrived. She grew timid and sat silent, rubbing her eyes from time to time as if to awaken herself from a dream. Zbyszko, in his inexperience, imagined that, for some reason unknown to him, she did not wish to speak to him. He therefore conversed only with Zych, praising his munificence and admiring the house at Zgorzelice, which, in fact, was very different from that at Bogdaniec.

Everything betokened comfort and wealth. In the rooms there were windows with panes made of horn cut into thin sheets and polished so that they seemed as transparent as glass. Instead of having fireplaces in the centre, the rooms had large chimneys in the corners. The

floors were made of larch planks, while on the walls hung suits of armour, many polished dishes, and silver spoons. Here and there were costly rugs brought from the wars. Under the tables lay enormous urus-skins. Zych showed his riches willingly, saying that it was Jagienka's household. He conducted Zbyszko to the alcove, fragrant with rosin and peppermint, in which hung from the ceiling great bunches of wolfskins, foxskins, beaverskins, and martenskins. He showed him the stores of cheese, honey, and wax, barrels of flour, pails of dried bread, hemp, and dried mushrooms. Then he led him to the granaries, barns, stables, cowhouses, and to the sheds filled with hunting implements and nets. Zbyszko was so dazzled by all this wealth that, during supper, he could not restrain his admiration.

"What a pleasure it must be to live in Zgorzelice!" he exclaimed.

"In Moczydoly there is almost the same wealth," answered Zych. "Do you remember Moczydoly? It is not far from Bogdaniec. Formerly our forefathers quarrelled about the boundaries, and challenged each other; but I shall not quarrel."

Here he filled Zbyszko's goblet with mead, and said:

"Perhaps you would like to sing?"

"No," answered Zbyszko; "but I shall listen to you with pleasure."

"Zgorzelice will belong to the young bears."

"What do you mean by the young bears?"

"Why, Jagienka's brothers!"

"Ha-ha! They will not have to suck their paws during the winter."

"No, but Jagienka also will have plenty in Moczydoly."

"That is true!"

"Why do you not eat and drink? Jagienka, pour out for him and for me."

"I am drinking and eating as much as I can."

"Ungird your belt, then you will be able to eat and drink more. What a fine girdle you have! You must have taken rich booty in Lithuania!"

"We cannot complain," answered Zbyszko, gladly seizing the opportunity to explain that the heirs of Bogdaniec were no longer wloodykas. "A part of our booty we sold in Krakow, and received forty silver marks for it."

"You do not say so! Why, with that one can buy an estate!"

"Yes. There was one Milanese suit of armour, which my uncle, expecting to die, sold for a good price."

"I know! Well, it is worth while to go to Lithuania. I wanted to go there also, but I was afraid."

"Of what? Of the Knights of the Cross?"

"Ho-ho! Who would be afraid of Germans? I was afraid of those heathenish gods and devils. It seems there are many of them in the woods."

"They have no other place of shelter, for their temples have been burned. Formerly they were prosperous, but now they live on mushrooms and ants."

"Have you seen them?"

"No, I have not seen any myself, but I have heard of people who have seen them. Sometimes one of them sticks out a hairy paw from behind a tree and shakes it, begging for something."

"Macko has told me the same," answered Jagienka.

"Yes, he told me about it on the road," said Zych.

"Well, no wonder! In our country also, although it has been a Christian country so long, one can hear laughter in the marshes; and although the priests denounce it in the churches, it is always good policy to put out a dish filled with food for the little devils, otherwise they will scratch on the walls so that one can hardly sleep. Jagienka, my dearest, put a dish on the threshold."

Jagienka took an earthen porringer full of noodles and cheese, and placed it at the threshold.

"The priests storm," said Zych, "but the Lord Jesus will not be angry about a dish of noodles; and a god, as soon as his hunger is satisfied, will protect one from fire and thieves."

Then he turned to Zbyszko.

"But will you not ungird yourself and sing a little?" he asked.

"You had better sing, or, perhaps, Panna Jagienka will sing."

"We shall sing by turns," exclaimed Zych. "We have a servant who will accompany us on a wooden fife. Call the boy!"

They called the servant, who sat down on the bench and put the fife to his mouth, waiting to be told whom he was to accompany.

None of them wished to be first. At length, Zych told Jagienka to begin, and she, although embarrassed by the presence of Zbyszko, rose from the bench, and, placing her hands beneath her apron, began:

My heart is heavy for lack of thee,
Of thee, my love! O my love!
To thee I'd fly over land and sea,
Were I but a bird, my love!

Zbyszko opened his eyes wide. Then, springing to his feet, he cried:

"Where did you learn that song?"

Jagienka looked at him in surprise.

"Everybody sings that," she said. "What is the matter with you?"

Zych, thinking that Zbyszko was a little intoxicated, turned his jovial face towards him and said:

"Ungird! It will relieve you!"

But Zbyszko stood still with astonishment in his face. Then recovering from his emotion, he said to Jagienka:

"Forgive me, I suddenly remembered something. Sing on."

"Perhaps it makes you sad?"

"Oh, not at all!" he answered with a quivering voice. "I could listen to it the whole night."

Then he sat down, covered his face with his hand, and listened.

Jagienka sang another verse; but when she had finished, she noticed a big tear rolling down Zbyszko's fingers.

She sat down beside him, and touched him with her elbow.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked. "I do not wish to make you weep. Tell me, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, nothing!" answered Zbyszko, sighing. "I could tell you much. But it is over. I am merry again."

"Perhaps you would like to have some sweet wine?"

"Good girl!" exclaimed Zych. "Call him 'Zbyszko,' and you call her 'Jagienka.' You have known each other since you were children."

Then he turned towards his daughter.

"Do not mind," he said, "because he struck you when you were children. He will not do so now."

"I will not!" answered Zbyszko mirthfully. "If she wishes, she may beat me now for it."

Then Jagienka, wishing to cheer him, began to make believe that she was striking him with her clenched hand.

"Give us some wine!" shouted the merry Pan of Zgorzelice.

Jagienka hurried to the closet and brought out a jug of wine, two beautiful silver goblets, engraved by a silver-smith of Wroclaw, and a couple of cheeses.

Zych, being a little intoxicated, began to hug the jug, saying to it, as if he were talking to his daughter:

"Oh, my dear girl! What shall I do when they take you from Zgorzelice; what shall I do?"

"And you must give her up soon!" said Zbyszko.

Zych began to laugh.

"Ha-ha! The girl is only fifteen, but she is already fond of the boys! Whenever she sees one she at once begins to rub knee with knee!"

"Tatulo! If you do not cease, I will leave you," said Jagienka.

"Do not go! It is better with you here." Then he went on, saying to Zbyszko:

"Two of them visit us. One of them is young Wilk, the son of old Wilk of Brzozowa; the other is Cztan of Rogow. If they meet you here they will gnash their teeth, as they do at each other."

"Pshaw!" said Zbyszko. Then he turned to Jagienka, and asked:

"Which do you prefer?"

"Neither of them."

"Wilk is a great boy," said Zych.

"Let him go elsewhere!"

"And Cztan?"

Jagienka began to laugh.

"Cztan!" said she, turning towards Zbyszko; "he has hair on his face like a goat. One can hardly see his eyes, and he has as much grease on him as a bear."

Zbyszko now touched his head with his hand, as if he had just remembered something important, and said:

"I must ask you for one thing more. Have you any bear's grease? I want it as medicine for my uncle, and I could not find any in Bogdaniec."

"We used to have some," answered Jagienka; "but the boys have used it to grease their bows, and the dogs have eaten the rest."

"Is there none left?"

"Not a bit!"

"Well, then, I must find some in the forest."

"Have a bear-hunt. There are plenty of them, and if you want hunting implements we will lend them to you."

"I cannot wait. Some night I will go to the beehives."

"Take a few men with you."

"No, I will not do that, for they would frighten the beast."

"But you will take a crossbow?"

"What can I do with a crossbow during the night? There is no moon! I will take a fork and a strong axe, and to-morrow I will go alone."

Jagienka was silent for a while, and great uneasiness was reflected on her face.

"Last year," said she, "the huntsman Bezduch was killed by a bear. It is dangerous, for, as soon as the bear sees a man near the hives, he immediately stands up on his hind feet."

"If he ran away I could not get him," answered Zbyszko.

At that moment Zych, who had been dozing, suddenly awakened.

"You know," he said to Zbyszko, "there are two of them—Wilk of Brzozowa and Cztan of Rogow—and you?"

But Jagienka, afraid lest Zych should say too much, hastily approached Zbyszko, and inquired:

"When are you going? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, after sunset."

"And to which hives?"

"To ours in Bogdaniec, not far from your boundaries and near the marshes of Radzikow. I am told it is very easy to get a bear there."

CHAPTER XIII.

ZBYSZKO went after the bear as he proposed, for Macko grew worse. At first, when the old man reached Bogdaniec, he had been sustained by the joy of returning home and by the delight of attending to the first wants of the house. But, on the third day, the fever returned, and the pain was so great that he was obliged to take to bed. Zbyszko went to the hives during the day, and while there he observed the footprints of a bear in the mud. He spoke to Wawrek, the beehive keeper, who then slept in a shed not far off, with his two fierce Podhalan dogs, although he intended soon to return to the village, because of the cold.

They destroyed the shed, and Wawrek took the dogs away with him. But first they smeared the trees here and there with honey, so that the smell of it should attract the animal. Zbyszko returned home, and began to prepare for the expedition. He dressed himself in a warm reindeer jacket without sleeves; on his head he put a bonnet made of iron wire; and, last of all, he took a strong fork and a steel axe. Before sunset, he had taken up his position; then, making the sign of the cross, he sat down and waited.

The red beams of the setting sun still shone between the branches of the gigantic pines. The crows flew about in the tree tops, croaking and beating the air with their wings; here and there the hares leaped towards the water, making a rustling noise over the dried leaves; sometimes a martin flew swiftly past. At first, the chirping of the birds could be heard in the thickets, but it gradually ceased.

After sunset the noises of the forest began. A pack of boars passed near Zbyszko with much roaring and snorting; elks galloped past in long files, each following close upon the other. The dried branches crackled under

their feet, and the forest resounded with the din; but on they rushed towards the marshes, where, during the night, they were cool and safe. At length the twilight was reflected in the sky, and the tops of the pine trees seemed to burn as if with fire. Then, little by little, all became quiet. The forest was still. Darkness rose from the earth to meet the gleaming twilight, which grew fainter and blacker, until, at last, it was quenched in the night.

"Now, all will be quiet until the wolves begin to howl," thought Zbyszko.

He regretted that he had not taken his crossbow, for with it he might easily have killed a boar or an elk. From the marshes came muffled sounds, like heavy breathing and panting. Zbyszko looked towards the marshes with some apprehension, for the peasant, Radzik, who used to live there in an earth hut, had disappeared, with his whole family, as if devoured by the earth. Some said they had been seized by robbers; but there were others who saw strange footprints, neither of man nor beast, round about the cabin. People shook their heads and even spoke of bringing a priest from Krzesnia to bless the hut. But they did not do so, as no one was willing to live in the hut, which from that time had an evil reputation. Wawrek, the beehive keeper, did not, however, pay any heed to these reports.

Zbyszko, armed with his fork and axe, was not afraid of the wild beasts, but he thought, with some uneasiness, of the evil forces of the forest, and he was glad when the mysterious noises ceased.

Complete silence reigned at last. The wind no longer blew, and there was not even a whisper from the tops of the pine trees. From time to time a pine cone fell, breaking the deep silence, but save for this everything was so quiet that Zbyszko heard his own breathing.

Thus he sat quietly for a long time, thinking first about the bear, and then about Danusia. He recollected how he had seized her in his arms when bidding the Princess farewell, and how she had cried; he remembered her fair head and bright face, her wreaths of bachelor buttons, her singing, her red shoes with the long tips, and, in a word, everything that had happened from the first moment he saw her. Such a longing to see her now filled his heart that he forgot he was in the forest waiting for the bear.

"I will go to see her," he said to himself. "I cannot live without her."

He felt that he must go to Mazovia. He remembered Jurand and his strange opposition, and then he thought it even more necessary that he should go to learn what this obstacle was, for, perhaps, a challenge to single combat might remove it.

At last, it seemed to him that Danusia was stretching her hands towards him and crying: "Come, Zbyszko! Come!" How, then, could he refuse?

He was not asleep, but he saw her as distinctly as in a dream. There she was, riding beside the Princess, thrumming on her little lute, humming a song, and thinking of him—thinking that she would soon see him.

Zbyszko roused himself and listened, for he heard a rustling sound behind him. Then he grasped the fork more tightly in his hand, stretched forward his head, and listened again.

The noise came nearer and grew more distinct. The dried branches crackled and the fallen leaves rustled, as if beneath some careful tread. Some one was approaching.

From time to time the sound ceased, as if the creature had halted beneath the trees. Then there was such silence that Zbyszko's ears began to ring; but presently slow, careful steps were again heard. The approach was so cautious that Zbyszko was startled.

"I am sure the Evil One must be afraid of the dogs which were here in the shed," said he to himself; "but it may be that a wolf has scented me."

The footsteps were now no longer heard. Zbyszko, however, felt sure that something had stopped some twenty or thirty paces behind him. He turned round once or twice; but, although he could see the trunks of the trees very clearly, he could perceive nothing else. He was obliged to wait. The silence continued so long that his surprise returned with renewed force.

"A bear would not come here to stop under the hives," he reflected, "and a wolf would not wait until morning."

Suddenly a shiver ran through his body.

"What," thought he, "if some dreadful creature has come from the marshes, and is trying to surprise me from behind! What if the slimy arms of some drowned man should seize me, or the green eyes of some ghost should look into my face! What if a blue head on spider's legs

should come out from behind the tree and begin to laugh!"

He felt his hair begin to rise beneath his iron bonnet. He heard a rustling sound in front of him, more distinct this time than before. Zbyszko breathed more freely. He thought that the mysterious creature had gone round about him, and was now approaching from the front, and this he preferred. He seized his fork firmly, rose up quietly, and waited. He now observed the quivering of the pine trees over his head, he felt the wind from the marsh blow in his face, and he smelt the bear. He had not the slightest doubt that one was coming! Zbyszko was afraid no longer, and, bending his head, he strained his hearing and sight to the utmost. He distinctly heard the sound of heavy footsteps approaching, and the scene grew stronger; soon he heard snorting and growling.

"I hope there are not two of them!" thought Zbyszko.

At that moment he perceived in front of him the great dark form of the animal, which was approaching from windward, and was thus unable to scent him; its attention, moreover, was attracted by the smell from the hive in the trees.

"Come on, uncle!" exclaimed Zbyszko, coming out from beneath the pine tree.

The bear growled, as if frightened by the unexpected apparition, but he was too near to seek safety in flight. In a moment he had reared and separated his forelegs ready to hug his enemy. This was precisely what Zbyszko was waiting for. He gathered himself together, sprang swiftly forward, and, with all the force of his weight and powerful arms, drove the fork into the animal's breast.

The whole forest now resounded with the beast's terrible roars. The bear seized the fork with his paws, and tried to pull it out, but the prongs were too deeply embedded in his flesh. Feeling the pain of the wound, he roared all the more dreadfully. In his attempts to attack Zbyszko he pressed against the fork, and thus drove it still further into his body. Zbyszko, not knowing that the points had entered so deeply, still held on to the handle. The two began to struggle. The forest again resounded with the beast's roars, in which wrath and despair were intermingled.

Zbyszko was unable to use his axe until the other end of the fork was fixed into the ground. The bear, having

seized the handle, was shaking both it and Zbyszko, and, notwithstanding the pain caused by every movement of the points embedded in his breast, he would not let it be under-propped. In this way the terrible struggle continued, until Zbyszko felt that his strength must soon be exhausted. If he fell he was lost, so, gathering all his strength, he strained his arms to the utmost, set his feet firmly, and bent his back like a bow, so as not to be thrown backwards.

"You or I must die!" he exclaimed resolutely between his set teeth.

Such anger filled him that, rather than let the beast go, he would willingly have met death itself at that moment. At length, however, his foot caught in the root of a tree; he tottered, and would have fallen had not a dark figure suddenly appeared before him, and, driving another fork into the beast, shouted into his ear:

"Use your axe!"

Zbyszko, excited by the fight, did not even wonder whence the unexpected help came, but seized the axe, and struck with all his might. The fork cracked, broken by the weight and by the dying convulsions of the falling beast. There was a long silence, broken only by Zbyszko's laboured breathing. Presently he lifted his head, and looked at the form standing before him. He was afraid, thinking that it might not be human.

"Who are you?" he asked with uneasiness.

"Jagienka!" answered a soft womanly voice.

Zbyszko was dumb with astonishment. He could not believe his own eyes. But his doubts did not last long, for he again heard Jagienka's voice saying:

"I will make a fire."

Immediately a steel was struck against a flint, and the sparks began to fall. By their glittering light, Zbyszko beheld the white forehead, the dark eyebrows, and the red lips of the girl, who was blowing on the tinder, which now began to burn. Not until then did he realise that she had come to the forest to help him, and that without her aid he must have perished. He felt such gratitude towards her that he impulsively seized her round the waist, and kissed her on both her cheeks.

The tinder and the steel fell to the ground.

"Let me be! Let me be!" she repeated in a muffled voice. But she allowed him to kiss her, and, as if by accident, she even touched Zbyszko's lips with her own.

"May God reward you!" he said as he released her. "Without your help, I do not know what would have happened."

Then Jagienka, while searching for the tinder and fire steel, began to excuse herself:

"I was anxious about you," she said, "for Bezduch also went out with a fork and an axe, but the bear tore him to pieces. If you were to meet with such a misfortune, Macko would be very desolate, and he hardly breathes now. So I took a fork and came."

"Then it was you whom I heard there behind the pines?"

"Yes."

"And I thought it was an evil spirit!"

"I was very much frightened, for it is dangerous to be without fire here, by the Radzikow marshes."

"Then why did you not speak to me?"

"Because I was afraid you would send me away."

Having said this, she again began to strike sparks from the steel, and now placed on the tinder a bundle of hemp, which began to burn.

"I have two pieces of pine wood," said she. "Bring some dried branches quickly, and we shall soon have a fire."

In a little while a bright fire was burning, showing the enormous brown body of the bear, as it lay in a pool of blood.

"Hah! A fearful beast!" said Zbyszko proudly.

"You have split his head quite open! O Jesus!"

Then she leaned over and felt the bear's body to learn whether or not the beast was fat. She then rose up with a bright smile on her face.

"There will be enough grease for two years," she said.

"But the fork is broken. Look!"

"That is unfortunate. What shall I tell them at home?"

"About what?"

"Father would not let me go into the forest, so I was obliged to wait until every one had gone to rest."

"You must not tell that I was here," she added after a pause, "for they would laugh at me."

"But I will go with you to your house, for I am afraid the wolves might attack you, and you have no fork."

"Very well."

Thus they sat talking beside the bright fire, looking like two young creatures of the forest.

Zbyszko gazed at the girl's pretty face, lit by the flames.

"There is not another girl in the world as brave as you," he said with involuntary admiration. "You ought to go to the wars!"

"I know," she answered almost sadly as she looked into his face; "but you must not laugh at me."

CHAPTER XIV.

JAGIENKA herself melted a large pot of the bear's grease. Macko soon drank the first quart, for it was fresh, and smelt good. Jagienka put the rest of it in a pot. Macko's hope increased, and he was sure he would be cured.

"That is what I needed," said he. "When everything inside of me has become greasy, then that German hound's splinter will slip out."

But the following quarts did not taste so well as the first; still he continued to drink it, for Jagienka encouraged him, saying:

"You will get well. Zbilud of Ostrog had the links of a coat of mail driven into his neck, but they slipped out because he drank grease. But when your wound opens you must put some beaver grease on it."

"Have you any?" asked Macko.

"Yes, we have. But if it be necessary to have it fresh, we will go with Zbyszko and get a beaver. Meanwhile, it would not do any harm if you were to promise a gift to some saint who is a patron of the wounded."

"I was thinking of that, but I do not know to whom I should make the promise. Saint George is the patron of knights; he protects the warrior from any mishap, and always gives him victory, and it is said that sometimes he fights in person for him who is in the right. But a saint who fights willingly does not heal willingly, and for that there must be some other saint with whom he would not wish to interfere. It is known that every saint has his special sphere. They will not interfere with one another, for that would cause quarrels, and it is not meet to fight in Heaven. There are Saint Cosmo and Saint Damian, to whom all physicians pray in order that illness may exist, otherwise the doctors would have nothing to eat. There are Saint Apollonia for the teeth, and Saint Liborius for gravel, but they will not do for

me. The abbot, when he comes, will tell me whom I must ask. Every cleric does not know all the divine secrets; all of them are not familiar with such things, but the abbot is."

"Suppose you make a vow to the Lord Jesus Himself?"

"Of course, He is over all. But suppose your father had injured my servant, and I went to Krakow to complain to the King, what would the King say? He would say thus: 'I am monarch over all the country, and you complain to me about one of your peasants! Do you not have my officials in your part of the country? Why did you not go to the castellan?' So the Lord Jesus is the ruler over the whole universe, but for lesser affairs He employs the saints."

"Then I will tell you what to do," said Zbyszko, who had just entered. "Make a vow to our late Queen that, if she intercede for you, you will make a pilgrimage to Krakow. Why should you search after saints when we have our own lady, who is better than they?"

"Pshaw! If I only knew that she would intercede for wounds!"

"No matter! There is no saint who would dare to show her an angry face; or, if he dared, the Lord God would punish him for it, for she was no common woman, but a Polish Queen."

"Who converted the last heathen country to the Christian faith!" said Macko. "That is right; she must have a high place in God's council, and surely none would dare oppose her. I will therefore do as you say."

This advice pleased Jagienka, who greatly admired Zbyszko's wisdom. That same evening Macko made his vow and drank the bear's grease with still greater hope. But, after a week, he began to lose hope again. He declared that the grease fermented in his stomach, and that a lump was growing on his side near his lowest rib. At the end of ten days Macko was worse, and the lump grew larger and became inflamed. The sick man again had fever, and began to make preparations for death.

One night he awakened Zbyszko, and said:

"Light a piece of pine wood; there is something the matter with me, but I do not know what."

Zbyszko jumped up, and lighted a piece of pine wood.

"What is it?" he asked.

"What is it?" exclaimed Macko. "Something has pierced the lump on my side. It must be the head of the spear! I have laid hold of it, but cannot pull it out."

"It must be the spear-head—nothing else! Grasp it well, and pull."

Macko began to twist and writhe with pain; but he pushed his fingers deeper and deeper into his flesh, until he seized a hard substance, which he at last pulled out.

"O Jesus!" he cried.

"Have you pulled it out?" asked Zbyszko.

"Yes. I am in a cold sweat all over, but I have it. Look!"

As he spoke, he showed Zbyszko a long splinter, which had been broken from the spear and had remained in his body for several months.

"Glory be to God and to Queen Jadwiga! Now you will get well."

"Perhaps. I am better, but it pains me sorely," said Macko, pressing the wound, from which blood and pus began to flow. "Jagienka said that I ought now to dress the wound with the grease of a beaver."

"We will go to-morrow and get a beaver," said Zbyszko.

Macko was better next day. He slept till morning, and when he awoke he at once asked for something to eat. He would not even look at the bear's grease, but they cooked twenty eggs for him. He ate these voraciously, with a great loaf of bread, and drank four quarts of beer. Then he asked them to call Zych, as he felt in a jovial humour.

Zbyszko sent one of the Turks given him by Zawisza to Zych, who mounted a horse and came in the afternoon, as the young people were setting out for the Odstajny Lake to catch a beaver. At first there was much laughter and singing, while the old men drank their mead; but afterwards the old wlodykas began to talk about the children, each praising his own.

"What a fellow is Zbyszko!" said Macko. "There is no other like him in the world. He is brave, and as agile as a wild cat. Do you know that, when they led him to the scaffold in Krakow, all the girls at the windows wept. And such girls!—daughters of knights and castellans, and the beautiful women of the city besides."

"They may be beautiful, and the daughters of castellans, but they are not better than my Jagienka!" answered Zych of Zgorzelice.

"Did I say they were better? It would indeed be difficult to find a better girl than Jagienka."

"I do not say anything against Zbyszko, either. He can stretch a crossbow without a crank."

"He can underprop a bear also. Did you see how he cut the bear? He cut the head and one paw right off."

"He cut its head off, but he did not underprop it alone. Jagienka helped him."

"Did she? He did not tell me about that."

"Because he promised her not to tell anyone. The girl was ashamed, because she went into the forest alone at night. She told me all about it; she never hides the truth. To speak frankly, I was not pleased, for who knows what might have happened? I should have scolded her, but she said: 'If I am not able to preserve my wreath myself, how can you preserve it, you tatulo? But do not fear, Zbyszko knows what knightly honour is.'"

"That is true. They have gone alone to-day also."

"They will be back in the evening. But during the night the devil is worse, and the girl does not feel herself ashamed because of the darkness."

Macko thought for a moment; then he said, as if to himself:

"But they are fond of each other!"

"Ah! It is a pity he has made a vow to another!"

"That is, as you know, a knightly custom. They consider one who has no lady a churl. He has also made a vow to capture some peacock plumes, and those he must get, for he swore by his knightly honour. He must also challenge Lichtenstein, but from the other vows the abbot can release him."

"The abbot is coming soon."

"Do you expect him?" asked Macko. "And what does such a vow amount to?" he continued. "Jurand told him positively that he could not give the girl to him. I do not know whether he has promised her to some one else, or whether he has destined her for God."

"Have I told you that the abbot loves Jagienka as if she were his own child? The last time I saw him he said: 'I have no kin except those from my mother's side, and they shall receive nothing from me.'"

Here Macko looked at Zych suspiciously, then he answered:

"Would you wrong us?"

"Jagienka will get Moczydoly," said Zych evasively.

"Immediately?"

"Immediately! I would not give it to another, but I will do so for her."

"Half of Bogdaniec belongs to Zbyszko; and, if God restores my health, I will improve the estate. Does she love Zbyszko?"

Zych began to wink, and said:

"When anybody mentions Zbyszko's name in the presence of Jagienka, she immediately turns away."

"And when you mention another?"

"When I mention another, she only laughs and says: 'What then?'"

"Well, do you not see? God will help us, and Zbyszko will forget the other girl. Will you have some more mead?"

"Yes."

"Well," Macko proceeded, "the abbot is a wise man! You know that some of the abbots are laymen, but this abbot, although he does not sit among the monks, is a priest as well, and a priest can always give better advice than an ordinary man, because he knows how to read, and communes with the Holy Ghost. I am glad that Jagienka is going to have the estate of Moczydoly. As for me, as soon as the Lord Jesus restores my health, I will try to induce some of the peasants living on the estate of Wilk of Brzozowa to settle on my land. In time I shall build a grodek in Bogdaniec, a worthy castle of oak, with a ditch round it. Let Zbyszko and Jagienka hunt together—I think we shall soon have snow. They will become accustomed to each other, and the lad will forget that other girl. Let them be together. Speak frankly; would you give Jagienka to him or not?"

"I would. Did we not decide long ago that they should marry, and that Moczydoly and Bogdaniec should be our grandchildren's?"

"Grady!" exclaimed Macko joyfully. "God will bless us, and their children will be as numerous as hail. The abbot shall baptize them."

"If Zbyszko will only make haste!" exclaimed Zych. "I have not seen you so merry as you are to-day for a long time."

"Because I have gladness in my heart. Have no fear for Zbyszko. Yesterday, when Jagienka mounted her

horse, the wind blew. I asked Zbyszko then: 'Did you see?' and his eyes shone. I have also observed that although at first they did not speak much to each other, now, when they go together, they are continually turning their eyes towards each other, and they talk—they talk! Have some more mead?"

"Yes."

"To the health of Zbyszko and Jagienka!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE old wloodyka was not mistaken when he said that Zbyszko and Jagienka were fond of each other, and even that they longed for each other. Jagienka, pretending that she wished to visit the sick Macko, went very often to Bogdaniec, either alone or with her father. Zbyszko also went often to Zgorzelice. Thus, in a few days, a friendship grew up between them. They grew fond of each other, and talked much about everything that interested them. There was also much mutual admiration in their friendship. The young and handsome Zbyszko, who had already distinguished himself in war, who had taken part in tournaments, and had been in the presence of kings, was regarded by the girl, when she compared him with Cztan of Rogow or Wilk of Brzozowa, as a true courtly knight—nay, a prince. As for him, he was astonished at the great beauty of the girl. He was loyal to Danusia, but very often, when he looked suddenly at Jagienka, either in the forest or at home, he said involuntarily to himself: "Ah, what a girl!" When, helping her to mount her horse, he felt her pliant flesh under his hands, he was filled with disquietude; he trembled, and a sort of languor began to steal over him.

Jagienka, although naturally proud, imperious, and inclined to raillery, grew more and more gentle with him, often looking into his eyes to discover how she could please him. He was conscious of her affection; he was grateful for it, and his liking for her companionship grew. Then they saw each other almost every day, especially after Macko began to drink the bear's grease. When the splinter came out of the wound, they went together to get the fresh beaver's grease necessary for its cure.

They took their crossbows, and mounted their horses. They went first to Moczydoly, which was destined to be

Jagienka's dowry, and then to the border of the forest, where they entrusted the horses to a servant, and proceeded on foot, as it was impossible to pass through the thicket on horseback. While walking, Jagienka pointed to the broad meadow covered with reeds, and to the blue strip of forest.

"Those woods belong to Cztan of Rogow," said she.

"The man who would like to have you."

She began to laugh.

"He would if he could."

"You can defend yourself very easily, having for your defence Wilk, who, I understand, gnashes his teeth at Cztan. I wonder that they have not challenged each other to mortal combat."

"They have not, because tatulo, before he went to the war, said to them: 'If you fight about Jagienka I shall never wish to see you again.' How, then, could they fight? When they are in Zgorzelice they scowl at each other, but afterwards they drink together in an inn at Krzesnia until they are drunk."

"Foolish fellows!" said Zbyszko.

"Why?"

"Because while Zych was away one of them should have taken you by force. What could Zych have done if, when he returned, he had found you with a child on your lap?"

At this Jagienka's blue eyes flashed.

"Do you think I would have let them take me?" she exclaimed. "Have we not people in Zgorzelice, and do I not know how to manage a crossbow or a boar-spear?"

As she spoke, she frowned and shook the crossbow threateningly, so that Zbyszko began to laugh.

"You ought to have been a knight, and not a girl," he said.

"Cztan guarded me from Wilk, and Wilk from Cztan," she resumed more calmly. "Besides, I was under the abbot's tutelage, and it is well for every one to let the abbot alone."

"Pshaw!" answered Zbyszko. "They are all afraid of the abbot. But I—may Saint George help me to speak the truth!—I would not be afraid of the abbot, or of your peasants, or of yourself. I would take you!"

At this Jagienka stopped on the spot, and, fixing her eyes on Zbyszko, asked in a strangely soft and low voice:

"You would take me?"

Then her lips parted, and, blushing like the dawn, she waited for his answer.

But, apparently, he was only thinking what he would do were he in the position of Cztań or Wilk, for he shook his golden hair and said:

"A girl must marry and not fight with the young men. Unless you have a third lover, you must choose one of these two."

"You must not tell me that," answered the girl sadly.

"Why not? I have been away from home for a long time, so I do not know whether there is some one near Zgorzelice of whom you are fond or not."

"Ha, ha!" answered Jagienka. "Let it be!"

They walked along silently, trying to make their way through the thicket, which was now much denser, as the bushes and trees were covered with wild hop vines. Zbyszko walked first, tearing down the green vines, and breaking the branches here and there. Jagienka followed him, with a crossbow on her shoulder, looking like a goddess of the chase.

"Beyond that thicket," said she, "there is a deep brook; but I know where the ford is."

"I have long boots on, reaching above my knees," answered Zbyszko. "We can cross it."

Shortly afterwards they reached the brook. Jagienka, being familiar with the forests of Moczydoly, very easily found the ford, but the water was deeper than usual, the little brook being swollen by the rains. Then Zbyszko, without asking her permission, seized the girl in his arms.

"I can cross by myself," she cried.

"Put your arms round my neck," answered Zbyszko.

He walked slowly through the water, while the girl clung close to him. At length, when they were near the other shore, she said:

"Zbyszko!"

"What?"

"I care neither for Cztań nor for Wilk."

As he placed her on the shore, he answered excitedly:

"May God give you the best! He will not be wronged!"

The Odstajny Lake was not far off now. Jagienka, who walked in front, turned from time to time and, placing a finger on her lips, ordered Zbyszko to be silent.

They were walking among the osiers and grey willows, on low, damp ground. On their left hand they could hear the voices of birds, which surprised Zbyszko, as it was the season for the birds to migrate.

"We are near a morass which is never frozen," whispered Jagienka. "The ducks pass the winter there. Even in the lake, the water freezes only near the shores. See how it is steaming!"

Zbyszko looked through the willows, and saw in front of him something like a bank of fog. It was the Odstajny Lake.

Jagienka again put a finger to her lips, and at last they reached the lake. The girl climbed an old willow and bent over the water. Zbyszko followed her example. For a long time they remained silent, seeing nothing in front of them because of the fog, and hearing nothing but the mournful cry of the lapwings. At length the wind began to blow, causing the osiers and the yellow leaves of the willows to rustle, and disclosing the rippling waters of the lake.

"Do you see anything?" whispered Zbyszko.

"No. Keep still!"

The wind died out, and complete silence followed. Presently a head appeared on the surface of the lake, and then another; then, close by, a big beaver entered the water from the shore, carrying in his mouth a newly broken branch, and began to swim among the duckweed and marsh marigold, holding his mouth out of the water, and pushing the branch before him. Zbyszko, who lay on the trunk beneath Jagienka, noticed that her elbow moved quietly and that her head was bent forward. Evidently she had aimed at the animal, which, not suspecting any danger, was swimming towards the clear water.

The string of the crossbow twanged, and at the same moment Jagienka cried:

"I have hit him! I have hit him!"

Zbyszko instantly climbed higher, and looked through the thicket towards the water. The beaver dived, and then reappeared on the surface, turning several somersaults.

"I have hit him! He will soon be quiet!" cried Jagienka.

The movements of the animal now grew feebler, and

before one could have repeated an "Ave," he was floating on his back on the water.

"I will go and get him," said Zbyszko.

"No, do not go!" said the girl. "Near the shore there is deep slime. Any one who does not know how to manage will certainly drown."

"Then how shall we get him?"

"He will be in Bogdaniec to-night; do not trouble about that. Now we must go home."

"You aimed well!"

"Pshaw! That is not the first one!"

"Other girls are afraid even to look at a crossbow, but with you one could go to the forest all one's life."

Jagienka smiled at such praise, but did not answer. They returned as they came. Zbyszko asked her about the beavers, and she told him how many of them there were in Moczydoly, and how many in Zgorzelice. Suddenly she struck her hip with her hand and exclaimed:

"Why, I have left my arrows among the willows! Wait!"

Before he could say that he would return for them, she hastened back like a roe and disappeared. Zbyszko waited and waited; at last he began to wonder what detained her so long.

"She must have lost the arrows, and is searching for them," he said to himself. "But I will go and see whether anything has happened to her."

He had hardly started to return before the girl appeared with her bow in her hand, her face smiling and flushed, and with the beaver over her shoulders.

"For God's sake!" cried Zbyszko. "How did you get him?"

"How? I went into the water, that is all! It is nothing new for me; but I did not want you to go, because the mud drags anyone down who does not know how to swim in it."

"And I waited here like a fool! You are a sly girl!"

"Well, could I have undressed before you?"

"Pshaw! If I had but followed you, I should have seen wonders!"

"Be silent!"

"I was just setting out, so help me God!"

"Be silent, I say!"

"Wring out my tress," she said, wishing to turn the conversation; "it makes my back wet."

Zbyszko caught the tress with one hand and began to wring it with the other.

"It will be best to unbind it," he said; "then the wind will soon dry it."

But she would not do so because of the thicket through which they had to make their way. Zbyszko now put the beaver across his shoulders.

"Now Macko will soon be well," said Jagienka, as she walked in front of him. "There is no better medicine for a wound than the grease of a bear within and the grease of a beaver without. In about two weeks from now he will be able to ride a horse."

"May God grant it!" answered Zbyszko. "I am waiting for it as for salvation, for I cannot leave the sick man, and it is hard for me to stay here."

"Why is it hard for you to stay here?" she asked him.

"Has Zych told you nothing about Danusia?"

"He did tell me something. I know that she covered you with her veil. Yes, I know that! He told me also that every knight makes some vow to serve his lady. But he said that such a vow did not amount to anything, that some of the knights were married, but they served their ladies just the same. But Danusia—Zbyszko, tell me about her!"

Coming very close to him, she began to look into his face with great anxiety. He, however, paid no heed to her anxious voice and looks, but said:

"She is my lady, and at the same time she is my sweetest love. I have not spoken about her to anyone, but I am going to tell you, for we have known each other since we were children. I will follow her beyond the tenth river and beyond the tenth sea, to the Germans and to the Tartars, for there is no other girl like her. Let my uncle remain in Bogdaniec, but I will go to her. What do I care about Bogdaniec, or the household, or the herds, or the abbot's wealth, without her? I will mount my horse and go, so help me God! I will fulfil that which I have promised her, or die."

"I did not know," answered Jagienka, in a hollow voice.

Zbyszko began to tell her of all that had happened—how he had met Danusia in Tyniec, and how he had made

a vow to her; of everything that had happened afterwards; of his imprisonment, and his rescue by Danusia; of Jurand's refusal, their farewell, and his loneliness; and of his joy because, as soon as Macko became well, he should be able to go to his beloved. His story was interrupted by the sight of the servant with the horses, who was waiting at the edge of the forest.

Jagienka immediately mounted her horse and began to bid Zbyszko farewell.

"Let the servant follow you with the beaver. I am going to Zgorzelice."

"Then you will not go to Bogdaniec? Zych is there."

"No. Tatulo said he would return, and told me to go home."

"Well, may God reward you for the beaver."

"With God, then!"

Jagienka was alone. As she went home across the heaths she looked back after Zbyszko, and, when he had disappeared beyond the trees, she covered her eyes with her hand as if sheltering them from the sunlight. But, as she looked, great tears began to flow down her cheeks and dropped, one after another, on her horse's mane.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER the conversation with Zbyszko, Jagienka did not appear in Bogdaniec for three days; but on the third day she arrived hurriedly, with the news that the abbot had arrived at Zgorzelice.

She said that the abbot was in good health and in a merry mood; that he was accompanied by a considerable retinue, in which, besides the armed servants, there were several seminarists and rybals; that he sang with Zych, and listened gladly not only to spiritual, but to worldly songs also. She had observed, moreover, that he asked carefully about Macko, and that he listened eagerly to Zych's narration of Zbyszko's adventure in Krakow.

"You know best what you ought to do," the intelligent girl added, "but I think that Zbyszko ought to go immediately to greet his venerable kinsman, and not wait until the abbot comes to Bogdaniec."

Macko liked the advice, so he called Zbyszko, and said to him:

"Dress yourself carefully, and go and bow before the abbot, and pay him your respects. Perhaps he will take a liking to you."

Then, turning to Jagienka, he said:

"I should not have been surprised if you were stupid, for you are a woman; but I am astonished to find that you have such good sense. Tell me, then, the best way to receive the abbot when he comes here."

"As for food," said Jagienka, "he will tell you himself what he wishes to have. He likes to feast well, but if there is a great deal of saffron in the food, he will eat anything."

Macko, hearing this, said:

"How can I get saffron for him?"

"I have brought some," said Jagienka.

"Give us more such girls!" exclaimed the overjoyed

Macko. "She is pretty, a good housekeeper, intelligent, and good-hearted. Hah! If I were only younger, I would take her in a moment!"

Thus they talked, while Zbyszko was dressing in the alcove. At last he came out, looking so handsome that he dazzled Jagienka as much as when he first went to Zgorzelice in his white jaka. She felt sorry that this handsome knight was not her own, and that he was in love with another maiden.

Macko was pleased, for he thought that the abbot could not help liking Zbyszko, and would be more lenient in their business transactions. He was so much pleased with this idea that he determined to go also.

"Order the servants to prepare a waggon," said he to Zbyszko. "If I could travel from Krakow to Bogdaniec with a spear-head in my side, surely I can go now to Zgorzelice."

"If only you do not faint!" said Jagienka.

"Oh! I shall be all right; I feel stronger already. And even if I faint, the abbot will see that I hastened to meet him, and will be more generous."

"I prefer your health to his generosity!" said Zbyszko.

But, as Macko was persistent, they set out for Zgorzelice. On the road he moaned a little, but continued to give Zbyszko advice, telling him how to act at Zgorzelice, and especially recommending him to be obedient and humble in the presence of their mighty relative, who, he declared, would never brook the slightest opposition.

When they came to Zgorzelice, they found Zych and the abbot sitting in front of the house, looking out over the beautiful landscape and drinking wine. Behind them, near the wall, sat six men of the abbot's retinue. Two of them were rybalt; one was a pilgrim, who could easily be distinguished by his crooked staff and dark mantle; the others looked like seminarists, for their heads were shaved, although they wore lay clothing, girdles of ox leather, and swords.

When Zych perceived Macko coming in the waggon, he hastened towards him; but the abbot, evidently remembering his spiritual dignity, remained seated. Zbyszko and Zych conducted the sick man towards the house.

"I am not yet well," said Macko, kissing the abbot's hand, "but I came to bow before you, my benefactor, to thank you for your care of Bogdaniec, and to beg you for your benediction."

"I heard you were better," said the abbot, placing his hand on Macko's head, "and that you had vowed to go to the grave of our late Queen."

"Not knowing which saint's protection to ask for, I made a vow to her."

As for the abbot he panted loudly and looked about at those present; then he suddenly laughed, and, gazing at Zbyszko, asked:

"Is that your nephew, my kinsman?"

Zbyszko bent and kissed his hand.

"I saw him when he was a small boy," said the abbot. "I did not recognise him. Show yourself!" And he began to look at him from head to foot.

"He is too handsome!" he said at length. "It is a girl, not a knight!"

"The girl used to go dancing with the Germans," Macko replied, "but those who took her fell down and never rose again."

"And he can stretch a crossbow without a crank!" exclaimed Jagienka.

"Ah!" said the abbot, turning towards her, "are you here?"

She blushed so much that her neck and ears became red.

"I saw him do it," she answered.

"Have a care, then, that he does not shoot you, for you will have to nurse yourself for a long time."

At this the rybalts, the pilgrim, and the seminarists burst into laughter, which confused Jagienka still more. The abbot took pity on her, and, raising his arm, he held out his enormous sleeve to her, saying:

"Hide here, my dear child!"

Meanwhile, Zych helped Macko to the bench and ordered some wine for him. Jagienka went off to get it.

"Enough of jesting!" said the abbot, turning to Zbyszko. "I likened you to a girl not to humiliate you, but to praise your beauty, of which many girls might be proud. But I know that you are a man. I have heard about your deeds at Wilno, about the Frisians, and about Krakow. Zych has told me all about it."

Here he looked intently into Zbyszko's eyes, and said:

"If you have vowed to capture three peacock plumes, then search for them! It is praiseworthy, and pleasing to God to punish the foes of our nation. But, if you have promised anything else, I will release you from the vow."

"Hah!" said Zbyszko, "when a man vows something in his soul to the Lord Jesus, who has the power to release him?"

Macko looked with fear at the abbot; but evidently the abbot was in an excellent humour; for, instead of becoming angry, he threatened Zbyszko with his finger, and said:

"How clever you are! But you must be careful that you do not meet the same fate that Beyhard the German did."

"What happened to him?" asked Zbyszko.

"They burned him on a pile."

"For what?"

"Because he used to say that a layman could understand God's secrets as well as the clergy."

"Then they punished him severely!"

"But righteously!" shouted the abbot, "because he blasphemed against the Holy Ghost. What do you think? Is a layman able to interpret any of God's secrets?"

"He cannot by any means!" exclaimed the seminarists together.

"Be silent!" said the abbot; "you are not ecclesiastics, although your heads are shaven."

"What surprises me most," said Zbyszko, "is that they wear swords, although they are wandering seminarists."

"They are allowed to wear them," said the abbot, "because they have not yet received orders, and, moreover, there is no occasion for any one to wonder, for I, too, wear a sword, even though I am an abbot. A year ago I challenged Wilk of Brzozowa to fight for the forests through which you have passed, but he did not appear."

"How could he fight with one of the clergy?" interrupted Zych.

At this the abbot became angry, and struck the table with his fist.

"When I wear armour," he exclaimed, "then I am not a priest, but a nobleman! He did not come, because he preferred to have his servants attack me in Tulcza. That is why I wear a sword. *Omnes leges, omniaque jura vim vi repellere cunctisque sese defensare permittunt!* That is why I gave them their swords."

Hearing the Latin, Zych, Macko, and Zbyszko became silent, and bent their heads before the abbot's wisdom, for they did not understand a word of it. As for the abbot, he looked very angry for a moment, then he said:

"Who knows but what he will attack me even here?"

"Pshaw! Let him come!" exclaimed the seminarists, seizing the hilts of their swords.

"He will not do that," said Zych. "It is more likely that he will come to bow before you. He gave up the forests, and now he is anxious about his son."

Meanwhile, the abbot had grown calmer, and said:

"I saw young Wilk drinking with Cztan of Rogow in an inn at Krzesnia. They did not recognise us at once, for it was dark. They were talking about Jagienka."

Here he turned to Zbyszko.

"And about you too," he added.

"What do they wish of me?"

"They do not wish anything of you, but they do not like a third young man to be near Zgorzelice. Cztan said to Wilk: 'After I have tanned his skin he will not be so smooth.' And Wilk said: 'Perhaps he will be afraid of us; if not, I will break his bones!' Then they assured each other that you would be afraid of them."

Hearing this, Macko looked at Zych, and Zych looked at him. Their faces expressed both cunning and joy. Neither of them was sure whether the abbot had really heard such a conversation, or whether he was only saying this to excite Zbyszko, but they both knew, and especially Macko, that there was no better way to incite Zbyszko to try to win Jagienka.

"It is true," added the abbot deliberately, "that they are fierce fellows!"

Zbyszko did not exhibit any excitement; he merely asked, in a strange tone which did not sound like his own voice:

"To-morrow is Sunday?"

"Yes, Sunday."

"You will go to church?"

"Yes!"

"Where? To Krzesnia?"

"That is the nearest!"

"Good!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ZBYSZKO, having joined Zych and Jagienka, who were accompanying the abbot and his retinue to Krzesnia, rode along with them, as he wished to show the abbot that he was afraid neither of Wilk of Brzozowa nor of Cztan of Rogow. He was again surprised at Jagienka's beauty. He had often seen her dressed charmingly in Zgorzelice and Bogdaniec, but never had she appeared so beautiful as she did now on her way to church. Her cloak was made of red broad-cloth, lined with ermine; she wore red gloves, and on her head was a little hood, embroidered with gold, from beneath which two braids fell down on her shoulders.

Zych, Zbyszko, Jagienka, and the abbot rode together. The abbot ordered his seminarists to sing some church songs; afterwards, when he was tired of this, he began to talk with Zbyszko, who smiled at his enormous sword, which was as large as the two-handed German weapon.

"I see," said he gravely, "that you wonder at my sword. The synod permits a clergyman to wear a sword during a journey, and I am travelling. When the Holy Father forbade ecclesiastics to wear swords and red clothing, most assuredly he meant the men of low birth, for God intended that noblemen should wear arms, and he who would dare to take this right from a nobleman, opposes His eternal will."

"I saw the Prince Henryk of Mazovia when he fought in the lists," said Zbyszko.

"We do not censure him because he fought," answered the abbot, raising his finger; "but because he married, and married unhappily; fornicarium and bibulam had taken mulierem, whom Bachum, since she was young, adorabat, and, besides that, she was adultera, of whom no one could expect any good." Here he stopped his horse, and began to expound with still greater gravity:

"Whoever would marry, or choose uxorem, must ascertain if she be pious, moral, a good housekeeper, and cleanly. This is recommended not only by the fathers of the Church, but also by a certain pagan sage called Seneca. And how can you know whether you have chosen well, if you do not know the nest from which you take your companion. For another sage has said: 'Pomus nam cadit absque arbore.' As is the ox, so is the skin; as is the mother, so is the daughter."

"In saecula saeculorum, amen!" exclaimed in unison the wandering seminarists, who, when responding to the abbot, did not always answer properly.

After this the retinue moved on silently, but when they came near Krzesnia, the abbot touched his girdle, and then turned it so that he could seize the hilt of his sword more easily.

Zbyszko, while riding beside Jagienka, said to her:

"I am sure that in Krzesnia we shall meet young Wilk and Cztan. Show me them from afar, so that I may know them."

"I will, Zbyszko," answered Jagienka.

"Do they not meet you before the service and after the service? What do they do then?"

"They serve me."

"They shall not serve you now—do you understand?"

And she answered again, almost with humility:

"I do, Zbyszko."

Further conversation was interrupted by the sound of the wooden knockers, there being no bells in Krzesnia. A few moments later they arrived at the church. From the crowd in front, waiting for mass, young Wilk and Cztan of Rogow came forward immediately; but Zbyszko leaped from his horse, and, before they could reach her, seized Jagienka, and lifted her from her horse. Then he took her by the hand, and, looking at them threateningly, conducted her to the church.

In the vestibule the two suitors were again disappointed. Both rushed to the font of holy water, plunged their hands in, and then stretched them towards the girl. But Zbyszko did the same, and she touched his fingers; then, having made the sign of the cross, she entered the church with him. Then, not only young Wilk, but—notwithstanding his dulness—Cztan of Rogow also understood that this had been done purposely, and both were very

angry. Wilk rushed out of the vestibule and ran off like a madman, not knowing where he was going. Cztan, too, rushed after him, but without knowing why.

They stopped at one corner of the enclosure, where some large stones were lying ready for the foundations of the tower which was to be built in Krzesnia. Wilk, to assuage the wrath which raged in his breast, seized one of the stones, and began to shake it. Cztan, seeing him act thus, seized it also, and both began rolling it towards the church gate.

The people looked on at them with amazement, thinking that they had made some vow, and that in this way they wished to contribute to the building of the tower. The effort gave them relief, and presently they came to their senses. Then they stood still, hot with their exertions, panting, and gazing at each other.

"What shall we do?" asked Cztan after a pause. "Shall we send him a challenge?"

Wilk, although he was the wiser, did not know what to do. Fortunately, the knockers now sounded to inform the people that mass was about to begin. When he heard them he said:

"What shall we do? Let us go to church now, and after that we will do whatever pleases God."

They went into the church, and, listening devoutly to the mass, they grew more hopeful. They did not lose their temper after the service, when Jagienka again accepted holy water from Zbyszko. In the churchyard they bowed to Zych, to Jagienka, and even to the abbot, although he was an enemy of Wilk of Brzozowa. They scowled at Zbyszko, but did not attempt to touch him, although their hearts were bursting with grief, anger, and jealousy. Never before had Jagienka seemed to them so beautiful as now. When the brilliant retinue moved on, and when from afar they heard the merry song of the seminarists, Cztan wiped the perspiration from his hairy cheeks, and snorted like a horse. As for Wilk, he cried, gnashing his teeth:

"To the inn! To the inn! Woe is me!" Then, remembering what had relieved them before, they again seized the stone, and rolled it back to its former place.

Zbyszko rode beside Jagienka, listening to the abbot's minstrels singing their merry songs. But when they had travelled five or six furlongs, he suddenly reined in his horse.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "I intended to purchase a mass to be said for my uncle's health, and I have forgotten it. I must return."

"Do not go back," cried Jagienka; "we can send from Zgorzelice."

"No, I will return, and you must not wait for me. With God!"

"With God!" said the abbot. "Go!" And his face brightened. When Zbyszko had disappeared, he touched Zych with his elbow, and said:

"Do you understand?"

"What?"

"He will surely fight in Krzesnia with Wilk and Cztan; but I wished it, and I am glad."

"They are dreadful fellows! If they wound him, then what of it?"

"What of it? If he fight for Jagienka, then how can he think afterwards about that other girl, Jurandowna? From this time, Jagienka will be his lady, not the other girl; and I would have it so, for he is my kinsman, and I like him."

"Pshaw! But what about his vow?"

"I will give him absolution in the twinkling of an eye! Have you not heard that I have promised to absolve him?"

Meanwhile Zbyszko, having returned to Krzesnia, went directly to the priest, for he really wished to have a mass said for Macko's health. Having settled that, he went to the inn, where he expected to find Wilk of Brzozowa and Cztan of Rogow.

He found both of them there, and many other people besides—noblemen, farmers, and a few madcaps performing various German tricks. At first he could recognise no one, as the windows of the inn, being made of ox bladders, did not let in a good light. But when the servant had put some pine wood on the fire, he observed, in a corner behind the beer buckets, Cztan's hairy cheeks and Wilk's furious face.

He walked slowly towards them, pushing aside those in his way. When he reached them, he struck the table so heavily with his fist that the noise resounded throughout the whole inn.

They arose immediately, and began to turn their girdles. But, before they could grasp the hilts of their

swords, Zbyszko threw down a glove, and, speaking through his nose, as knights were wont to do in uttering a challenge, he said these words, which were totally unexpected by every one:

"If either of you, or any other knightly person here present, will question or deny that the most beautiful and virtuous maiden in the world is Panna Danuta Jurandowna of Spychow, him will I challenge to combat, on horseback or on foot, until the first kneeling, or until the last breath!"

Wilk and Cztan were astonished as much as the abbot would have been had he heard Zbyszko's words, and it was some time before they could say a word. Who was this panna? They cared only for Jagienka, and not for her, and if this youth did not care for Jagienka, then what was his purpose? Why had he made them angry in the churchyard? Why had he returned; and why did he wish to quarrel with them? These questions caused such confusion in their minds that they opened their mouths wide, and stared at Zbyszko as if he were not a man but some German wonder.

But the more intelligent Wilk, who was somewhat familiar with chivalrous customs, and knew that a knight often served one lady but married another, thought he must seize the opportunity to defend Jagienka. He accordingly came out from behind the table, and, coming close to Zbyszko, asked threateningly:

"Then, dog-brother, you mean to declare that Jagienka Zychowna is not the most beautiful girl in the world?"

Cztan followed, while the others surrounded them, for all understood that the quarrel could not end in mere words.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Jagienka reached home, she immediately sent a servant to Krzesnia to learn whether there had been a fight in the inn, or whether there had been only a challenge. But the servant, who had been given a coin, stopped to drink with the priest's servants, and did not hasten. Another servant, who had been sent to Bogdaniec to inform Macko that the abbot was going to pay him a visit, returned, having fulfilled the commission, and reported that he had seen Zbyszko playing dice with the old man.

This partly soothed Jagienka, for she knew how dexterous Zbyszko was, and she was not so much afraid of a regular duel as of some unfortunate accident occurring at the inn. She wished to accompany the abbot to Bogdaniec, but he was not willing that she should go. He desired to talk with Macko about the pledge and other important business; and, moreover, he did not wish to set out until late in the afternoon. Learning that Zbyszko had returned home safe, he became very jovial, and ordered his seminarists to sing. They obeyed him so well that the forest resounded with their noise, and in Bogdaniec the farmers came out from their houses to see whether there was a fire or an invasion by the enemy. The pilgrim, riding ahead, quieted them by telling them that a high ecclesiastical dignitary was coming. So, when they saw the abbot, they bowed before him, and some of them made the sign of the cross on their breasts. Seeing how they respected him, he rode with joyful pride, pleased with the world, and full of kindness towards the people.

Hearing the singing, Macko and Zbyszko came to the gate to meet him. Some of the seminarists had previously visited Bogdaniec with the abbot, but others of them, who had recently joined the retinue, had never seen it until

now. They were disappointed, therefore, when they beheld the miserable house, which could not be compared with the great mansion in Zgorzelice, but they were reassured when they saw the smoke coming out from the thatched roof, and they were greatly pleased when, upon entering, they smelt saffron and different kinds of meats, and saw two tables covered with tin dishes, empty as yet, but enormous. On the smaller table, which was prepared for the abbot, shone a silver dish and a beautifully engraved silver cup, both taken, along with the other treasures, from the Frisians.

Macko and Zbyszko immediately invited them to table; but the abbot, who had eaten plentifully in Zgorzelice, declined, as he had something else on his mind. Since his arrival he had looked at Zbyszko attentively and uneasily, as if anxious to see on him some traces of the fight; but, observing the quiet face of the youth, he began to be impatient. Finally, he was unable to restrain his curiosity any longer.

"Let us go into the chamber," said he, "to speak about the pledge. Do not refuse me; that will make me angry!"

Here he turned to the seminarists and cried:

"And you, keep still, and do not listen at the door!"

Having said this, he opened the chamber door and entered, followed by Zbyszko and Macko. As soon as they were seated on the chests, the abbot turned towards the young knight.

"Did you go back to Krzesnia?" he asked.

"Yes, I was there."

"And what then?"

"Well, I paid for a mass for my uncle's health; that is all."

The abbot moved on the chest impatiently.

"Ha!" thought he, "he did not meet Cztan and Wilk. Perhaps they were not there—perhaps he did not look for them. I was mistaken."

He was angry at his mistake, and because his plans had not been realised. His face speedily grew red, and he began to breathe loudly.

"Let us speak about the pledge!" said he. "Have you the money? If not, then the estate is mine!"

Macko, who knew how to deal with him, rose silently, opened the chest on which he was sitting, and took out

of it a bag of silver marks, evidently prepared for the occasion, and said:

"We are poor, but we have the money. We will pay what is right, as it is written in the covenant, which I signed with the mark of the Holy Cross. If you want payment for the improvements, we will not quarrel about that either; we will pay the amount you say, and bow before you, our benefactor."

Having said this, he kneeled at the abbot's knee, and Zbyszko did the same. The abbot, who expected quarrels and arguments, was very much surprised at this proceeding, and not over-pleased with it. He wished to dictate conditions, and now he saw that he would have no opportunity to do so.

Returning the covenant, or rather the mortgage, which Macko had signed with a cross, he said:

"Why do you talk to me about an additional payment?"

"Because we do not desire to receive any presents," answered Macko cunningly, knowing well that the more he resisted in this matter the more he would get.

At this the abbot reddened with anger.

"Did one ever see such people? They will not accept anything, even from a kinsman. You have too much bread! I did not take waste land, and I do not return it waste. If I wish to give you this bag, I will give it!"

"You will not do that!" exclaimed Macko.

"I will not do it? Here is your pledge! Here is your money! I give it because I wish; and had I even thrown it into the road it would not be your affair. You will see if I shall not do as I wish!"

Having said this, he seized the bag and threw it on the floor so violently that it burst, and the money was scattered over the ground.

"May God reward you! May God reward you, father and benefactor!" exclaimed Macko, who had been waiting for this. "I would not accept it from any one else, but from a kinsman and a spiritual father I will accept it."

The abbot looked threateningly at both of them, and then said:

"Although I am angry, I know what I am doing; therefore, keep what you have, for I promise you that you shall not have a farthing more."

"We did not expect even this."

"You know that Jagienka will inherit everything I have?"

"The land also?" asked Macko simply.

"The land also!" shouted the abbot.

At this Macko's face grew long, but he presently recovered himself.

"Ah! Why should you think about death?" he said.

"May the Lord Jesus grant you a hundred years and more of life, and a good bishopric soon."

"Why not? Am I any worse than others?" said the abbot.

"Not worse, but better!"

These words appeased the abbot, for his anger never lasted long.

"Well," said he, "you are my kinsmen, and she is only my god-daughter, but I love her, and Zych also. There is no better man in the world than Zych, and no better girl than Jagienka. Who can say anything against them?"

He began to look angry, and Macko did not contradict him. He hastened to affirm that there was no worthier neighbour in the whole kingdom.

"And as for the girl," said he, "I could not love my own daughter any more than I love her. With her help I recovered my health, and I will never forget it until my death."

"You will both be punished if you forget it," said the abbot, "and I will curse you. But I do not wish to wrong you, so I have found a way by which all that I leave at my death may belong to you and to Jagienka. Do you understand?"

"May God help us to realise that!" answered Macko.

"Sweet Jesus! I would go on foot to the grave of the Queen in Krakow, or to Lysa Gora to kneel before the Holy Cross."

The abbot was very much pleased with such sincerity.

"The girl is perfectly right to be particular in her choice," said he, smiling, "for she is pretty, rich, and of good family! Of what account are Cztan or Wilk when a palatine's son would not be too good for her! But if some one like myself were to speak in favour of any particular suitor, then she would marry him, for she loves me, and knows that I will advise her well."

"The man whom you advise her to marry will be very lucky," said Macko.

"What do you say to this?" said the abbot, turning to Zbyszko.

"Well, I think as my uncle does."

The face of the abbot became still more serene. He struck Zbyszko's shoulder with his hand so hard that the blow echoed through the chamber.

"Why did you not let Cztan or Wilk approach Jagienka at church?" he asked.

"Because I did not wish them to think that I was afraid of them, and I did not wish you to think so."

"But you gave her the holy water?"

"Yes, I did."

The abbot gave him another friendly blow.

"Then, take her!"

"Take her!" exclaimed Macko like an echo.

At this Zbyszko gathered up his hair into its net and answered quietly:

"How can I take her, when before the altar in Tyniec I made a vow to Danusia Jurandowna?"

"You made a vow about the peacock plumes, and you must get them. But take Jagienka immediately!"

"No," answered Zbyszko, "for afterwards, when Danusia covered me with her veil, I promised that I would marry her."

The blood rushed to the abbot's face, his ears turned blue, and his eyes stood out. He approached Zbyszko and said, in a voice muffled with anger:

"Your vows are chaff, and I am the wind! Do you understand?"

And he blew on Zbyszko's head so powerfully that the net fell off and his hair was scattered over his shoulders. Then Zbyszko frowned, and, looking into the abbot's eyes, he said:

"My vows are in my honour, and above my honour. I alone am its guardian!"

At this the abbot, unaccustomed to any opposition, became so short of breath that, for a time, he could not speak. There was an ill-omened silence, which was at length broken by Macko.

"Zbyszko!" he exclaimed, "come to your senses! What is the matter with you?"

The abbot raised his hand, and, pointing towards the youth, cried:

"What is the matter with him? I know what is the

matter. He has not the heart of a nobleman, or of a knight, but of a hare! That is the matter with him. He is afraid of Cztań and Wilk!"

But Zbyszko, who had remained cool and calm, carelessly shrugged his shoulders and answered:

"Pshaw! I broke their heads when I was in Krzesnia."

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Macko.

The abbot stared for a while at Zbyszko. Anger struggled with admiration in him, and his reason told him that from this fight he might derive some benefit for his plans.

"Why did not you tell us that before?" he exclaimed, becoming calmer.

"Because I was ashamed. I thought they would challenge me to fight on horseback or on foot, as is customary with knights; but they are robbers, not knights. Wilk first took a board from the table, then Cztań seized another, and they both rushed upon me! What could I do? I seized a bench. Well—you know!"

"Are they still alive?" asked Macko.

"Yes, they are alive, but they were sorely hurt. They still breathed when I left."

The abbot rubbed his forehead and listened. He then suddenly jumped from the chest on which he had seated himself in order to be more comfortable while thinking the matter over, and exclaimed:

"Wait! I have something to tell you!"

"What?" asked Zbyszko.

"If you fought for Jagienka, and injured them for her sake, then you are really her knight—not Danusia's. You must take Jagienka!"

Having said this, he put his hands on his hips and looked at Zbyszko triumphantly. But Zbyszko smiled and said:

"Hah! I knew very well why you wanted me to fight with them, but you have not succeeded in your plans."

"Why? Speak!"

"Because I challenged them to deny that Danusia Jurandowna is the loveliest and most virtuous girl in the world. They took Jagienka's part, and that is why there was a fight."

Having heard this, the abbot stood amazed, and only the frequent movement of his eyes indicated that he was still alive. At length he turned round, opened the door

with his foot, and rushed into the next room. There he seized the crooked staff from the pilgrim's hands, and began to beat the minstrels with it, roaring like a wounded urus.

"To horse, you rascals!" he shouted. "To horse, you dogs! I will not put foot in this house again. To horse, he who believes in God! To horse!"

Then he opened the outer door and hurried into the courtyard, followed by the frightened seminarists. They hastened to the stable and began to harness the horses. In vain Macko followed the abbot and entreated him to remain, swearing that it was not his fault. The abbot cursed the house, the people, and the fields. When they brought him a horse he leaped into the saddle without touching the stirrups, and galloped away, looking, with his large sleeves filled by the wind, like an enormous red bird. The seminarists rode wildly after him, like a herd following its leader.

Macko stood looking after them a long time; but when they had disappeared in the forest he returned slowly to the room and said to Zbyszko, shaking his head sadly:

"Do you see what you have done?"

"It would not have happened if I had gone away, and it is your fault that I did not."

"Why?"

"Because I did not wish to leave you when you were sick."

"And what will you do now?"

"Now I shall go."

"Where?"

"To Mazovia to see Danusia, and then to seek for the peacock plumes among the Germans."

Macko was silent for a moment; then he said:

"He returned the letter, but the mortgage is recorded in the mortgage-book at the court. Now the abbot will not give us a single farthing."

"I do not care. You have money, and I do not need anything for my journey. I shall be received everywhere, and my horse will be fed. If I only have a suit of armour on my back and a sword in my hand, I need nothing else!"

Macko began to think over everything that had happened. All his plans and wishes had been frustrated. He had desired with his whole heart that Zbyszko should

marry Jagienka, but now he realised that this wish could never be fulfilled; and, considering the abbot's anger, the behaviour of Zbyszko towards Jagienka, and the fight with Cztan and Wilk, he concluded that it would be better to allow Zbyszko to go.

"Ha!" he said at length, "if you must seek for peacock plumes on the heads of Knights of the Cross, go then. Let the Lord Jesus' will be accomplished. But I must go to Zgorzelice without delay. Perhaps I shall succeed in appeasing their wrath, if I implore pardon of the abbot and of Zych. I care especially for the friendship of Zych."

Here he looked into Zbyszko's eyes and asked:

"Do not you regret Jagienka?"

But Zbyszko only answered:

"May God give her health, and the best of everything!"

PART III.

CHAPTER XIX.

MACKO waited patiently for several days, hoping to receive news from Zgorzelice, or to hear that the abbot's anger had been appeased. But at last he grew impatient, and determined to go in person and see Zych. Everything had happened contrary to his wishes. He was afraid that the abbot would never again be reconciled with Zbyszko and himself. He wanted, however, to do everything he could to soften his anger. His thoughts, however, were not clear, and he was therefore glad to find Jagienka alone. The girl received him, as usual, with a bow, and kissed his hand, but she seemed sad.

"Are you lonely now at Bogdaniec?" she asked.

"Very lonely," answered Macko. "Then you knew that Zbyszko had gone away?"

"Yes," she replied with a slight sigh, "I knew it the very same day. I thought he would have come here to bid me farewell, but he did not."

"How could he have come?" said Macko. "The abbot would have torn him to pieces; neither would your father have welcomed him."

She shook her head and said:

"Oh! I should not have allowed any one to hurt him."

Upon this, Macko embraced the girl, and said:

"God be with you, child! You are sad, but I also am sad. Let me tell you that neither the abbot nor your father loves you more than I. I wish that Zbyszko had chosen you, and not another."

For a moment Jagienka's grief and longing were such that she could not conceal her feelings.

"I shall never see him again," she exclaimed, "or, if I see him, it will be with Jurandowna, and then I shall cry my eyes out."

She raised her apron and covered her eyes, which were filled with tears.

"Cease weeping!" said Macko. "He has gone, but, with God's grace, he will not come back with Jurandowna."

"Why not?" said Jagienka from behind her apron.

"Because Jurand will not give him his daughter."

Then Jagienka suddenly uncovered her face, and, turning turning towards Macko, said:

"Zbyszko told me so, but is it true?"

"As true as that God is in heaven."

"But why?"

"Who knows why? He liked Zbyszko, for the boy promised to help him in his vengeance; but even that was useless. Jurand would listen neither to persuasions, nor commands, nor prayers. He said he could not. Well, there must be some reason why he cannot, and he will not change his mind, for he is stern and unyielding. Do not lose hope, but be brave. And, to tell the truth, the boy was obliged to go, for he had sworn in church to secure three peacock plumes. Then, too, the girl covered him with her veil, which was a sign that she would take him for her husband. But otherwise they would have beheaded him. For that he must be grateful to her—one cannot deny it. But, with God's help, she will not be his; yet, according to the law, he is hers. Since it is so, he was obliged to go. He is a nobleman. But I tell you that if the Germans do not kill him he will come back; and he will come back not only to me, an old man, not only to Bogdaniec, but to you, for he was fond of you."

"I do not believe he was!" said Jagienka.

But she drew near Macko, and, touching him with her elbow, asked:

"How do you know it? I am sure that it is not true."

"How do I know?" answered Macko. "I saw how difficult it was for him to go away. When it was decided that he must go, I asked him: 'Do not you regret Jagienka?' and he said: 'May God give her health, and the best of everything.' And then he began to sigh."

"I am sure that it is not true!" said Jagienka softly. "But tell it me again."

"As God is dear to me, it is true! After seeing you he will not care for the other girl, for there is no girl more beautiful than you in the whole world."

"But when will he return?"

"Pshaw! If you are not willing to wait, then you will not be wronged. Repeat what I have told you to the abbot and to Zych; perhaps they will not be so angry with Zbyszko."

"How can I tell them anything? My father is more sorrowful than angry; but it is dangerous even to mention Zbyszko's name to the abbot. He scolded me because I sent Zbyszko a servant."

"What servant?"

"We had a Czech, whom my father captured at Boleslawiec, a good, faithful fellow. His name was Hlawa. Tatus gave him to my service because he was a wloDYka. I gave him worthy armour and sent him to Zbyszko, to serve and protect him. I also gave him a bag of money for the journey. He swore to me that he would serve Zbyszko faithfully until death."

"My dear girl! May God reward you! But was not Zych opposed to your doing this?"

"Yes; at first my father would not let me do it, but when I began to coax him he consented. As soon as the abbot heard of it, he rushed out of the room swearing, and there was such a disturbance that my father took refuge in the barn. But towards evening the abbot took pity on my tears and made me a present of some beads."

"As God is dear to me!" cried Macko, "I do not know whether I love Zbyszko any better than I love you! But he has a worthy retinue. I also gave him money, although he did not wish to take it. Well, the Mazovians are not beyond the seas."

The conversation was interrupted by the barking of dogs, shouting, and the noise of brass trumpets in front of the house. Hearing this, Jagienka said:

"My father and the abbot have returned from hunting. Let us go outside; it will be better for the abbot to see you there, rather than meet you unexpectedly in the house."

She conducted Macko out of doors. In the courtyard, on the snow, they saw a throng of men, with horses and dogs, and bearing elks and wolves pierced with spears or shot with crossbows. The abbot saw Macko before he dismounted, and hurled a spear towards him, not with the purpose of striking him, but as a sign of his great anger against the household of Bogdaniec. But Macko

uncovered, and bowed to him as if he had observed nothing unusual. Jagienka, however, had not seen the abbot's action, because she was very much surprised to see her two wooers in the retinue.

"Cztan and Wilk are here," she exclaimed. "I suppose they met my father in the forest."

Immediately the thought ran through Macko's mind that perhaps one of them might yet get Jagienka, and with her Moczydoly and the abbot's lands, forests, and money. Then grief and anger filled his heart, especially when he perceived what followed. He saw Wilk of Brzozowa, whose father the abbot had wanted to fight only a short time before, spring to the abbot's stirrups and help him to dismount, while the abbot leaned in a friendly manner on the young nobleman's shoulder.

"The abbot will become reconciled with old Wilk," thought Macko, "and he will give the forests and the lands along with the girl."

His sad thoughts were interrupted by Jagienka, who said:

"They have been soon cured of their beating by Zbyszko; but even if they come here every day, it will not benefit them."

Macko looked, and saw that the girl's face was red with anger, and that her blue eyes sparkled with indignation, although she knew very well that Cztan and Wilk had taken part in the occurrence at the inn, and had been beaten for her sake.

"Pshaw!" said Macko. "You will do as the abbot commands."

"The abbot will do as I wish," she retorted.

"Gracious Lord!" thought Macko, "and that foolish Zbyszko has left such a girl as this!"

CHAPTER XX.

ZBYSZKO had left Bogdaniec with a sad heart. He felt strange without his uncle, from whom he had never been separated before, and to whom he was so accustomed that he did not know how he should manage without him during the journey, as well as in the war. Then he thought of Jagienka. Although he was on his way to Danusia, whom he loved dearly, still he had been so comfortable and happy with Jagienka that now he felt sad without her. He himself was surprised at his grief, and even somewhat alarmed about it.

He would not have cared if he had merely longed for Jagienka as a brother longs for a sister; but he longed to embrace her, to set her on horseback, to carry her over the brooks, to wring the water from her hair, to wander with her in the forest, to gaze at her, and to speak with her. He had become so accustomed to all this that, when he began to think about it, he forgot that he was going on a long journey to Mazovia. Instead of this, he recalled the moment when Jagienka had helped him in the forest when he was struggling with the bear.

"Had I only bade her farewell," he said to himself, "perhaps I should feel easier now."

At length he became afraid of these reminiscences, and shook them from his mind like dry snow from his mantle.

"I am going to Danusia, to my love!" he said to himself.

He observed that this was a more sacred love. All his thoughts now turned to Danusia Jurandowna. To her he certainly belonged; but for her he would have been beheaded on the square of Krakow. When, in the presence of the knights and burghers, she said: "He is mine!" she rescued him from the hands of the executioners. From that time he belonged to her, as a slave to his

master. Jurand's opposition was vain. She alone could drive him away; and even then he was bound by his vow.

At this moment Hlawa the Czech, sent by Jagienka, arrived, leading a horse.

"Be blessed!" said he, with a low bow.

"Be blessed for ever and ever!" answered Zbyszko. "Who are you?"

"Your servant, famous lord."

"What do you mean? These are my servants," said Zbyszko, pointing to the two Turks given to him by Sulimeczyl Zawisza, and to two sturdy men who, sitting on horseback, were leading the knight's stallions. "These are mine. Who sent you?"

"Panna Jagienka Zychowna of Zgorzelice."

"Return home, and thank the Panna for her favour. I do not want you."

But the Czech shook his head.

"I cannot return. They have given me to you, and, besides this, I have sworn to serve you until death."

"Then I command you to return."

"I have sworn. Although I am poor, and a prisoner from Boleslawiec, still I am a wloodyka."

"Go away!" said Zbyszko angrily. "What! Do you mean to serve me against my will? Go away before I order my servants to bend their crossbows."

But the Czech quietly untied a broad-cloth mantle, lined with wolfskins, handed it to Zbyszko, and said:

"The Panna Jagienka sent you this also, sir."

"Do you wish me to break your bones?" asked Zbyszko, taking a spear from an attendant.

"Here is also a bag of money for your disposal," continued the Czech.

Zbyszko was about to strike him with the lance, but he reflected that the lad, although a prisoner, was by birth a wloodyka, and had remained with Zych only because he did not have money to pay his ransom. Zbyszko therefore lowered the spear.

"What if I order my servants to kill you or to bind you?"

"If you order them to kill me, that will not be my sin; and if you order them to bind me, then I will remain until some good people undo me, or until the wolves devour me."

Zbyszko did not reply. He urged his horse forward, and his attendants followed him. The Czech, with a crossbow and axe on his shoulder, came after, shielding himself with a shaggy bison-skin, for a sharp wind had begun to blow and flakes of snow began to fall. The storm grew worse and worse. The Turks, although dressed in sheepskin coats, were chilled with cold. Zbyszko himself, not being very warmly dressed, glanced several times at the mantle lined with wolfskin, which Hlawka had brought him, and, after a while, he told one of the Turks to give it to him.

Having carefully wrapped himself in it, he felt a warmth spread all over his body. Then he thought involuntarily how good Jagienka had been to him. He reined in his horse, called the Czech, and asked him about her and everything that had happened in Zgorzelice.

"Does Zych know that the Panna sent you to me?" he asked.

"He knows it," answered Hlawka.

"Was he not opposed to it?"

"He was."

"Tell me, then, all about it."

"The lord walked about the room, and the Panna followed him. He shouted, but the Panna said nothing; when he turned towards her, she kneeled but did not utter a word. At last the lord said: 'Have you become deaf, that you do not answer me? Speak; then, perhaps, I will consent.' Then the Panna understood that she could do as she wished, and began to thank him. The Pan reproached her for persuading him, and complained that he had always to do as she wished. Then he said: 'Promise me that you will not go secretly to bid him farewell; then I will consent, but not otherwise.' Then the Panna became very sorrowful, but she promised; the Pan was satisfied, for both the abbot and he were afraid that she would see you. Well, that was not the end; afterwards, the Panna wanted to send two horses, but the Pan would not consent. The Panna wanted to send a wolfskin and a bag of money, but the Pan refused. But his refusal was of no avail. I have, therefore, brought the two horses, the wolfskin, and the bag of money."

"The good girl!" thought Zbyszko.

They then became silent, and rode along through the wind and snow. Suddenly Zbyszko reined in his horse.

From the forest beside the road there was heard a plaintive voice, half stifled by the roar of the wind.

"Christians!" moaned the voice, "help God's servant in his misfortune!"

Hereupon a man, who was partly dressed in clerical clothing, rushed to the roadside and began to cry to Zbyszko:

"Whoever you are, dear sir, help a fellow-creature who has met with a dreadful mishap!"

"What has befallen you, and who are you?" asked the knight.

"I am God's servant, although not yet ordained. This morning the horse which was carrying my chests containing holy things ran away, and I was left alone without weapons. Evening is approaching, and soon the wild beasts will begin to roar in the forest. I shall perish, unless you succour me."

"If I let you perish," answered Zbyszko, "I shall be accountable for your sins; but how am I to know that you speak the truth. You may be a highway robber, like many others wandering on the roads."

"You may believe me, sir, for I will show you the chests. Many a man would give a purse full of gold for the things that are in them; but I will give you some of them for nothing if you will take me and the chests with you."

"You told me that you were God's servant, yet you do not know that one must give help, not for earthly recompense but for spiritual reward. But how is it that you have the chests now if the horse carried them away?"

"The wolves devoured the horse in the forest, but the chests remained. I brought them to the roadside, and then waited for mercy and help."

To prove that he was speaking the truth, he pointed to two leather chests, which were lying under a pine tree. Zbyszko still looked at him suspiciously, for the man did not look honest, and his speech indicated that he came from a distant part of the country. He did not refuse to help him, however, but permitted him to ride the horse led by the Czech, and also to take the chests, which proved to be very light.

"May God multiply your victories, valiant knight!" said the stranger.

Then, seeing Zbyszko's youthful face, he added below his breath:

"And the hairs of your beard also!"

He rode beside the Czech. For a time they could not talk, for a strong wind was blowing and roaring through the forest; but when it fell Zbyszko heard the two men conversing behind him.

"I do not deny that you were in Rome," said the Czech; "but you look very like a beer drunkard."

"Beware of eternal damnation," answered the stranger. "You are talking to one who, last Easter, ate hard-boiled eggs with the Holy Father. Do not speak to me of beer in such cold weather; but, if you have a flask of wine with you, then give me two or three draughts of it, and I will pardon you a month of purgatory."

"You have not been ordained—I heard you say you had not. How, then, can you grant me pardon for a month of purgatory?"

"I have not received ordination, but I have my head shaved—I received permission for that. Besides, I am carrying indulgences and relics."

"In these chests?" asked the Czech.

"Yes, in the chests. If you saw all I have there you would fall on your face, and not only you, but the pines in the forest and the wild beasts."

The Czech, however, looked suspiciously at this pedlar of indulgences.

"The wolves devoured your horse?" he inquired.

"Yes, they devoured him, for they are the devil's kin. But, if you have any wine, give me some; although the wind has ceased, yet I am frozen, having sat by the road so long."

The Czech, however, would not give him any wine, and they rode along silently, until the stranger asked:

"Where are you going?"

"We are going far. First of all to Sieradz. Are you going with us?"

"I must. I will sleep in the stable, and perhaps to-morrow this pious knight will give me a present of a horse; then I will go further."

"Where are you from?"

"From the dominion of Prussian lords, not far from Marienburg."

Hearing this, Zbyszko turned and motioned to the stranger to come nearer to him.

"Have you come from Marienburg?" said he.

"Yes, sir."

"But you are a German? You speak our language very well. What is your name?"

"I am a German, and they call me Sanderus. I speak your language well, for I was born in Torun; then I lived in Marienburg, and there it is the same. Even the brothers of the Order understand your tongue."

"How long is it since you left Marienburg?"

"Long! I was in the Holy Land, then in Constantinople and Rome; thence, through France, I came to Marienburg, and from there I was going to Mazovia with the holy relics, which pious Christians willingly buy for the salvation of their souls."

"Have you been in Plock or in Warsaw?"

"I have been in both cities. May God give good health to both the Princesses! Princess Alexandra is greatly esteemed even by the Prussian lords, because she is a pious lady; the Princess Anna Januszowna is also most pious."

"Did you see the Court in Warsaw?"

"I did not see it in Warsaw, but in Ciechanow, where both the Princesses received me hospitably, and gave me munificent presents, such as it is meet that God's servant should receive. I left relics with them which will bring them God's blessing."

Zbyszko desired to ask about Danusia, but he knew that it would be unwise to make a confidant of this stranger, a man of low birth. Therefore, after a short silence, he asked:

"What kind of relics are you carrying?"

"I carry indulgences and relics. The indulgences are of different kinds; there are complete indulgences, some for five hundred years, some for three hundred, some for two hundred, and some, for a less time, which are cheaper, so that even poor people can buy them, and shorten the torments of purgatory. I have indulgences for future and for past sins; but do not think, sir, that I keep the money I receive for them. I am satisfied with a piece of black bread and a glass of water—that is enough for me. The money I carry to Rome, to accumulate enough for a new crusade. It is true, there are many swindlers who carry false indulgences, false relics, false seals, and false testimonials, and these are righteously pursued by the Holy Father's letters; but I was wronged by the Prior

of Sieradz, for my seals are authentic. Look, sir, at the wax, and tell me what you think of them."

"What about the Prior of Sieradz?"

"Ah, sir! I fear that he is infected with Wyclif's heresy. If, as your shield-bearer has told me, you are going to Sieradz, it will be better for me not to show myself before him, for I would not lead him into the sin of blasphemy against holy things."

"This means, speaking frankly, that he thinks you are a rogue."

"Were it a question of myself, I would pardon him for the sake of brotherly love; but he has blasphemed against my holy wares, for which, I fear me greatly, he will be eternally damned."

"What kind of holy wares have you?"

"It is not meet to talk of them with covered head; but for this once, having many indulgences ready, I give you, sir, permission to keep your cowl on, because the wind is again blowing. For this you will buy an indulgence, and the sin will not be counted against you. What have I not? I have a hoof of the ass on which the Holy Family rode during the flight into Egypt; it was found near the pyramids. The King of Aragon offered me fifty ducats for it. I have a feather from the wings of the archangel Gabriel, which he dropped during the Annunciation; I have the heads of two of the quails sent to the Israelites in the desert; I have the oil in which the heathen sought to boil St. John; I have a step of the ladder of which Jacob dreamed; I have the tears of St. Mary of Egypt, and some rust from St. Peter's keys. But I cannot mention any more. I am very cold, and your shield-bearer would not give me any wine."

"Those are indeed great relics, if they are authentic!" said Zbyszko.

"If they are authentic! Take the spear from your attendant and aim it, for it is the devil who is near, and brings such thoughts to you. If you do not wish to bring some misfortune on yourself, then buy an indulgence of me; otherwise, within three weeks, some one whom you love will die."

Zbyszko was frightened at this threat, for he thought of Danusia.

"It is not I," he said, "but the Prior of the Dominicans in Sieradz who does not believe."

"Look for yourself, sir, at the wax on the seals! As for the prior, I do not know whether he still lives, for God's justice is quick."

When they came to Sieradz, however, they found the prior still alive. Zbyszko went to see him, and purchased two masses, one of which was to be recited to insure the success of Macko's vow, and the other to insure that of his vow to obtain three peacock plumes. The prior was a foreigner, having been born in Cylia; but during his forty years' residence in Sieradz he had learned to speak the Polish language very well, and had become a great enemy of the Knights of the Cross. Having learned, therefore, of Zbyszko's enterprise, he said:

"A still greater punishment will fall upon them; but I will not dissuade you, for you have promised it upon your knightly honour, neither can there be punishment enough administered by Polish hands for the wrongs they have perpetrated in this land."

CHAPTER XXI.

THEY then began to talk about other matters. The young knight asked about the pedlar of relics whom he had met on the road. The prior told him that there were papal bulls ordering the bishops to examine such pedlars, and summarily punish those unprovided with authentic letters and seals. The testimonials of the stranger had seemed spurious to the prior; he had therefore wished to deliver him to the bishop's jurisdiction. He had escaped, however. Perhaps he was afraid of delaying his journey; but his flight had drawn on him still greater suspicion.

The prior invited Zbyszko to remain and pass the night in the monastery, but he would not, as he wanted to hang in front of the inn an inscription challenging to combat, on horseback or on foot, all knights who denied that Panna Danuta Jurandowna was the most beautiful and the most virtuous girl in the kingdom.

When he arrived at the inn, he asked for Sanderus.

"The prior thinks you are a scoundrel," said Zbyszko to him, "for he said: 'Why should he be afraid of the bishop's judgment if he has good credentials?'"

"I am not afraid of the bishop," answered Sanderus. "I am afraid of the monks, who know nothing about seals. I wished to go to Krakow, but I have no horse. I must therefore wait until some one makes me a present of one. Meanwhile, I will send a letter, and I will put my own seal upon it."

"If you will show that you know how to write, that will prove that you are not a churl; but how will you send the letter?"

"By some pilgrim or wandering monk. There are many people now on a pilgrimage to the Queen's tomb."

"Can you write a card for me?"

"I will write, sir, even on a board, anything you wish."

"I think it will be better on a board," said Zbyszko, "because it will not tear, and I can use it again later."

After a while, in fact, the attendants brought a new board, and Sanderus wrote on it. Zbyszko could not read what was written, but he ordered it to be fastened with nails to the door of the inn, and a shield to be hung under it, which was watched by the Turks in turn. Whoever should strike the shield would, by so doing, declare that he wished to fight. But neither that day nor the following day did the shield resound from a blow, and in the afternoon the sorrowful knight was ready to pursue his journey. Before setting out, however, Sanderus came to Zbyszko and said to him :

"Sir, if you hang out your shield in the land of the Prussian lords, I am sure your shield-bearer will buckle on your armour."

"What do you mean? Do not you know that a Knight of the Cross, being a monk, cannot have a lady, or be in love with one, because it is forbidden him?"

"I do not know whether it is forbidden them or not; but I know that they have them. It is true that a Knight cannot fight in a combat without bringing reproach upon himself, because he has sworn that he will fight only for the faith; but besides the monks there are many lay knights from distant lands, who have come to help the Prussian lords. They seek some one to fight with, and especially the French knights."

"I saw them at Wilno, and with God's permission I shall see them in Marienburg. I require the peacock crests from their helms, for I have made a vow—do you understand?"

"Sir, I will sell you two or three drops of the sweat which St. George shed while fighting the dragon. There is no relic which could be more useful to a knight. In return, give me the horse on which you have permitted me to ride. I will then give you also an indulgence for the Christian blood you will shed in the fight."

"Let me be, or I shall become angry. I will not buy your wares until I know that they are genuine."

"You are going, sir, so you have said, to the Mazovian Court. Ask there how many relics they bought from me—the Princess herself, the knights, and the girls for their weddings, at which I was present."

"For what weddings?" asked Zbyszko.

"As is customary before Advent, the knights were marrying as soon as they could, for the people expect that there will be a war between the Polish King and the Prussian lords about the province of Dobrzyn. Therefore some of them say: 'God knows whether we shall return!'"

Zbyszko was very anxious to hear about the war, but still more anxious to hear about the weddings, of which Sanderus was talking.

"Which girls were married there?" he asked.

"The Princess's ladies-in-waiting. I do not know whether even one remained, for I heard the Princess say that she would be obliged to look for other attendants."

Hearing this, Zbyszko was silent for a while; then, in an altered voice, he asked:

"Was Panna Danuta Jurandowna, whose name is on the board, married also?"

Sanderus hesitated before he answered. He himself did not know anything precisely; but he thought that, if he kept the knight anxious and perplexed, he would have more influence over him. Zbyszko's youth led him to suppose that he would be a generous lord. He had already observed the costly armour made in Milan, and the enormous stallions, which were such as everyone could not possess. He assured himself that if he travelled with such a knight, he would receive hospitality in noblemen's houses, and have a good opportunity to sell his indulgences. Hearing Zbyszko's question, therefore, he frowned, raised his eyes as if trying to recollect, and answered:

"Panna Danuta Jurandowna? Where is she from?"

"Jurandowna Danuta of Spychow."

"I saw all of them, but I cannot remember their names."

"She is very young; she plays the lute, and amuses the Princess with her singing."

"Aha! Young—plays the lute! There were some young girls married also. Is she dark, like an agate?"

Zbyszko breathed more freely.

"No, that was not she! Danusia is as white as snow, but she has rosy cheeks."

To this Sanderus replied:

"One of them, dark as an agate, remained with the Princess; nearly all the others were married."

"You say 'nearly all,' therefore not all. For God's sake, if you wish anything of me, try to recollect."

"In two or three days I might recollect. It will be best to give me a horse on which I may carry my holy wares."

"You will have it if you only tell the truth."

At that moment the Czech, who had been listening to the conversation, smiled and said:

"The truth will be known only at the Mazovian Court!"

Sanderus eyed him for a time, and then said:

"Do you think I am afraid of the Mazovian Court?"

"I do not say you are afraid of the Mazovian Court; but neither now nor in three days will you go away with the horse. If it be that you have lied, then you will not be able to go on your feet either, for my lord will order me to break them?"

"Be sure of that!" answered Zbyszko.

Sanderus now thought that it would be wiser to be more careful, and said:

"Had I wished to lie I should have said immediately whether she was married or not; but I said: 'I do not remember.' If you had common wisdom, you would recognise my virtue by that answer."

"My common wisdom is no brother to your virtue, for that is sister to a dog."

"My virtue does not bark, as your common wisdom does; and he who barks when alive may howl after death."

"That is certain! Your virtue will not howl after your death; it will gnash its teeth, provided it does not lose them in the service of the devil while living."

Thus they quarrelled. The Czech's tongue was ready, and for every word of the German's he answered two. Zbyszko, having asked about the road to Lenczyca, ordered the retinue to move forward.

Beyond Sieradz they entered thick forests, which covered the greater part of the country. Zbyszko was not afraid of robbers or of armed knights; he did not even think about them. But he was filled with great anxiety, and longed with his whole soul to be at the Mazovian Court. Should he find Danusia still a lady-in-waiting of the Princess, or the wife of some Mazovian knight? Sometimes it seemed to him impossible that she should forget him; sometimes he thought that perhaps Jurand had

gone to the Court from Spychow, and married the girl to some friend or neighbour. Jurand had told him in Krakow that he could not give Danusia to him; it was therefore evident that he had promised her to some one else. Evidently he was bound by an oath, and now, perhaps, he had fulfilled his promise. Zbyszko called Sanderus, and questioned him again, but the German prevaricated more and more.

Sometimes he was consoled by the thought of a great war. He felt that during the war he would forget everything, and escape all his sorrows and griefs. The great war seemed to be hanging in the air. It was not known whence the news came, for there was peace between the King and the Teutonic Order; nevertheless, wherever Zbyszko went, nothing else was spoken of. The people had a presentiment that it would come, and some of them said openly: "Why were we united with Lithuania if not to go against those wolves, the Knights of the Cross? We must finish them once for all, or they will destroy us." Others said: "Crazy monks! They are not content with Plowce! Death stands over them, and yet they have taken the land of Dobrzyn."

In every part of the kingdom preparations were being made, gravely, without boasting, as was customary when it was a question of a fight for life or death; but with the still, deep hatred of a mighty nation which had long suffered wrongs, and was, at last, ready to deal out terrible punishment. Zbyszko was pleased to see these hasty preparations at every step. Everywhere, other cares gave way to thoughts about horses and armour. Everywhere, the people were gravely inspecting spears, swords, axes, helmets, and javelins. The blacksmiths were busy day and night, hammering iron sheets and making heavy armour, which could hardly be lifted by the refined western knights, but which the strong noblemen of Wielko and Malopolska could very easily wear.

In Mazovia the people did not talk so much about the war. They also believed that it would come, but they did not know when. In Warsaw there was peace. The Court was in Ciechanow, which Prince Janusz had rebuilt after the Lithuanian invasion. Nothing of the old town now remained except the castle.

In the city of Warsaw, Zbyszko was received by Jasko Socha, the commander of the castle, and the son of the

Palatine Abraham, who was killed at Worska. Jasko knew Zbyszko, for he had been with the Princess in Krakow; he therefore received him hospitably and with joy. But the young man, before he began to eat or drink, asked Jasko about Danusia. He, however, did not know anything about her, for the Prince and Princess had been in Ciechanow ever since the autumn. In Warsaw there were only a few archers and himself to guard the castle. He had heard that there had been feasting and weddings in Ciechanow, but he did not know which girls had been married.

"But I think," said he, "that Jurandowna is not married. It could not have been done without Jurand, and I have not heard of his arrival. There are two brothers of the Order, komthurs, with the Commander of Szczytno, and also some foreign guests; on such occasions Jurand never goes to Court, for the sight of a white mantle enrages him. If Jurand were not there, there could be no wedding! If you wish, I will send a messenger to ascertain, and tell him to return immediately. But I firmly believe that you will find Jurandowna still a maid."

"I am going there to-morrow myself; but may God reward you for your kindness. As soon as the horses are rested, I will go, for I shall have no peace until I know the truth."

But Socha was not satisfied with this, and inquired among the nobles and soldiers whether they had heard of Jurandowna's wedding. But no one had heard anything of it, although there were several among them who had been in Ciechanow.

Meanwhile, Zbyszko retired greatly relieved. While lying in bed he decided to get rid of Sanderus; but afterwards he thought that the scoundrel might be useful to him, as he could speak German. Sanderus had not told him a falsehood; and although he was a costly acquisition—for he ate and drank as much as four men in the inns—still he was serviceable, and showed some attachment to the young knight. Then he possessed the art of writing, and that gave him a superiority over the shield-bearer, the Czech, and even over Zbyszko himself. Zbyszko therefore permitted him to accompany his retinue to Ciechanow. Sanderus was glad of this, for he observed that, being in respectable company, he won confidence and found purchasers for his wares more easily. After

stopping one night in Nasielsk, next day, towards evening, they perceived the walls of the castle of Ciechanow. Zbyszko stopped at an inn to don his armour, so as to enter the castle according to knightly custom, with his helm on his head and his spear in his hand; he then mounted his enormous stallion, and, having made the sign of the cross in the air, he hastened forward. He had gone only a short distance, when the Czech, who was riding behind him, drew near and said:

"Your Grace, some knights are coming behind us; they must be Knights of the Cross."

Zbyszko turned and saw, about half a furlong behind him, a splendid retinue, at the head of which rode two knights in full armour on fine Pomeranian horses, each of them wearing a white mantle with a black cross, and a helm with a tall plume of peacock feathers.

"For God's sake, Germans!" said Zbyszko.

Involuntarily he leaned forward in his saddle, and levelled his spear. Seeing this, the Czech seized his axe. The other attendants, being experienced in war, were also ready, not for fight—for servants did not participate in single combat—but to measure the space for a fight on horseback, or to level the ground for a fight on foot. The Czech alone, being a nobleman, was ready to fight; but he expected that Zbyszko would challenge before he attacked, and he was surprised to see the young knight level his spear before the challenge.

But Zbyszko came to his senses in time. He remembered how he had attacked Lichtenstein near Krakow, and all the misfortunes which followed; he therefore raised his spear, and handed it to the Czech. Without drawing his sword he galloped towards the Knights of the Cross. When he came near them he saw that there was a third knight, also with a peacock plume on his helm, and a fourth, without armour, who wore long hair, and seemed to be a Mazovian. Seeing them, he concluded that they must be envoys on their way to the Prince of Mazovia. He therefore said aloud:

"Let Jesus Christ be praised!"

"For ever and ever!" answered the long-haired knight.

"May God speed you!"

"And you also, sir!"

"Glory be to St. George!"

"He is our patron. You are welcome, sir!"

They then bowed. Zbyszko announced his name and style, his coat of arms, his war-cry, and whence he was going to the Mazovian Court. The long-haired knight said that his name was Jendrek of Kropiwnica, and that he was conducting some guests to the Prince—Brother Gottfried, Brother Rotgier, also Sir Fulko de Lorche of Lorraine, who, being with the Knights of the Cross, wished to see the Prince, and especially the Princess, the daughter of the famous Kiejstut.

While they were conversing, the foreign knights sat erect on their horses, occasionally bending their heads, which were covered with iron helms ornamented with tufts of peacock feathers. Judging from Zbyszko's splendid armour, they imagined that the Prince had sent some important personage, possibly his own son, to meet them. Jendrek of Kropiwnica continued:

"The Komthur, or, as we should say, the commander, from Jansbork is at our Prince's castle. He spoke to the Prince of these knights, who desired to visit him but did not dare to do so, especially this knight from Lorraine, who, being from a far country, thought that the land of the Saracens lay right beyond the frontier of the Knights of the Cross, and that there was continual war with them. The Prince immediately sent me to the boundary to conduct them safely to his castle."

"Could they not have come without your help?"

"Our nation is very angry with the Knights of the Cross, because of their great treachery. A German knight will embrace and kiss you, but he is ready at the same time to stab you with a knife from behind, and such conduct is odious to us Mazovians. Nevertheless, anyone will receive even a German in his house, and will not wrong his guest. But he would stop him on the road; there are many who do this for vengeance or for glory."

"Who among you is the most famous?"

"There is one whom all Germans fear to meet; his name is Jurand of Spychow."

The heart of the young knight throbbed when he heard that name, and he immediately determined to question Jendrek of Kropiwnica.

"I know!" said he. "I have heard of him. His daughter Danusia was a maid-in-waiting with the Princess. Afterwards she was married."

Having said this, he looked sharply into the eyes of the Mazovian knight, who answered with great astonishment:

"Who told you that? She is yet very young. It is true that very young girls are sometimes married; but Jurandowna is not married. I left Ciechanow six days ago, and I saw her then with the Princess. How could she marry during Advent?"

Zbyszko, on hearing this, felt impelled to seize the knight by the neck and shout: "May God reward you for the news!" but he controlled himself, and said:

"I heard that Jurand had given her to some one."

"It was the Princess who wished to give her, but she could not do so against Jurand's will. She wanted to give her to a knight in Krakow, who made a vow to the girl, and whom she loves."

"Does she love him?" exclaimed Zbyszko.

At this Jendrek looked sharply at him, smiled, and said:

"Ah! you are too inquisitive about that girl."

One could hardly see Zbyszko's face under his helm; but his nose and cheeks were so red that the Mazovian, who was fond of jesting, said:

"I am afraid the cold makes your face red!"

Then the young man grew still more confused, and answered:

"Yes, it must be so."

They moved forward and rode on silently for some time; but after a while Jendrek of Kropiwnica asked:

"What do they call you? I did not hear distinctly."

"Zbyszko of Bogdaniec."

"For heaven's sake! The knight who made a vow to Jurandowna had the same name!"

"Do you think that I shall deny that I am he?" answered Zbyszko proudly.

"There is no reason for doing so. Gracious Lord! Then you are the Zbyszko whom the girl covered with her veil? You are he! Ah, how happy they will be to see you at the Court! Even the Princess is very fond of you."

"May the Lord bless her, and you also for your good news. I suffered greatly when I heard that Danusia was married."

"She is not married. Although she will inherit Spychow, and there are many handsome youths at the Court, yet not one of them looks into her eyes, for all respect your vow. Then the Princess would not permit

it. There will be great joy, I tell you. Sometimes they tormented the girl. Some one would say to her: 'Your knight will not come back!' Then she would reply: 'He will come back! He will come back!' Sometimes they told her that you had married another, and then she cried."

These words made Zbyszko feel very tender. He also felt angry that Danusia had been vexed.

"I shall challenge those who said such things about me!" said he.

Jendrek of Kropiwnica began to laugh, and said:

"It was the women who tormented her! Will you challenge a woman? You can do nothing with a sword against a distaff."

Zbyszko was glad that he had met such a merry companion, and began to ask Jendrek about Danusia. He also inquired about the customs of the Mazovian Court, and about Prince Janusz and the Princess. He then related what he had heard about the war during his journey, and how the people were expecting it every day. He asked whether the people in the principalities of Mazovia also thought that it would soon come.

The heir of Kropiwnica did not think that the war was near. The people said that it could not be avoided, but he had heard the Prince himself say to Mikolaj of Dlugolas, that the Knights of the Cross were very peaceable now, and that, if the King only insisted, they would restore the province of Dobrzyn to Poland, or else try to delay the whole affair until they were well prepared.

"The Prince went to Marienburg a short time ago," said he. "During the absence of the Grand Master, the Grand Marshal received him, and entertained him with great hospitality. Now, there are some komthurs here, and other guests also are coming."

Here he paused for a time, and then added:

"People say that the Knights of the Cross have a purpose in coming here and going to Plock to the Court of Prince Ziemowit. They would like to have the Princes pledge themselves that they will not help the King, but help them; or, if they do not agree to help the knights, that at least they will remain neutral. But that the Princes will not do."

"God will not permit it. Would you stay at home? Your Princes belong to the kingdom of Poland!"

"No, we would not stay at home," answered Jendrek of Kropiwnica.

Zbyszko again glanced at the foreign knights and at their peacock plumes, and asked:

"Are these knights going for this purpose?"

"They are brothers of the Order, and that may be their motive. Who understands them?"

"And that third one?"

"He is going out of curiosity."

"He must be some famous knight?"

"Three heavily laden waggons follow him, and he has nine men in his escort. I should like to fight with such a man!"

"Can not you do so?"

"By no means! The Prince commanded me to guard them. Not one hair shall fall from their heads until they reach Ciechanow."

"Suppose I challenge them? Perhaps they would fight with me!"

"Then you would be obliged to fight with me first, for I will not permit you to fight with them while I live."

Zbyszko looked at the young nobleman in a friendly fashion, and said:

"You understand what knightly honour is. I shall not fight with you, for I am your friend; but in Ciechanow God will help me to find some pretext for a challenge to the Germans."

"In Ciechanow you can do as you please. I am sure there will be tournaments; then you can fight, if the Prince and the komthurs give permission."

"I have a board, on which is written a challenge to anyone who will not affirm that Panna Danuta Jurandowna is the most virtuous and beautiful girl in the world; but everywhere the people shrug their shoulders and laugh."

"Because it is a foreign custom, and, to speak frankly, a foolish one, which is not known in our country, except near the borders. That Lorrainer tried to pick a quarrel with some noblemen, asking them to praise some lady of his; but nobody could understand him, and I would not let them fight."

"What? He wanted to praise his lady? For God's sake!"

He looked closely at the foreign knight, and saw that his young face was full of sadness; he also observed

with astonishment that the knight had round his neck a rope made of hair.

"Why does he wear that rope?" asked Zbyszko.

"I could not find out, for they do not understand our language. Brother Rotgier can speak a few words, but not very well. But I think that this young knight has made a vow to wear the rope until he has accomplished some knightly deed. During the day he wears it outside of his armour, but during the night on his bare flesh."

"Sanderus!" called Zbyszko suddenly.

"At your service, sir," answered the German, approaching.

"Ask this knight who is the most virtuous and the most beautiful lady in the world."

Sanderus repeated the question in German.

"Ulryka von Elner," answered Fulko de Lorche.

He then raised his eyes and began to sigh. Zbyszko, hearing this answer, was indignant, and reined in his stallion; but, before he could reply, Jendrek of Kropiwnica pushed his horse between him and the foreigner, and said:

"You shall not quarrel here!"

Zbyszko turned to Sanderus and said:

"Tell him that I say that he is in love with an owl."

"Noble knight, my master says that you are in love with an owl!" repeated Sanderus like an echo.

At this de Lorche dropped his reins, drew the iron gauntlet from his right hand, and threw it in the snow in front of Zbyszko, who motioned to the Czech to lift it with the point of his spear.

Jendrek of Kropiwnica turned towards Zbyszko with a threatening face and said:

"You shall not fight. I will permit neither of you."

"I did not challenge him; he has challenged me."

"But you called his lady an owl. Enough of this! I also know how to use a sword."

"But I do not wish to fight with you."

"You will be obliged to, for I have sworn to defend the other knight."

"Then what shall I do?" asked Zbyszko.

"Wait! We are near Ciechanow."

Zbyszko, seeing that he could not do otherwise, called Sanderus, and told him to explain to the Knight of Lorraine that they could fight only in Ciechanow. De

Lorche listened, and nodded to signify that he understood; then, stretching his hand towards Zbyszko, he pressed his palm three times, which, according to the knightly custom, meant that they must fight, no matter when or where. Then, apparently on a good understanding, they moved on towards the castle of Ciechanow, whose towers could be seen standing out against the fiery sky.

It was still daylight when they arrived; but, after they announced themselves at the gate, it grew dark before the bridge was lowered. They were received by Zbyszko's former acquaintance, Mikolaj of Dlugolas, who commanded the garrison, consisting of a few knights and three hundred of the famous archers of Kurpie. To his great sorrow, Zbyszko learned that the Court was absent. The Prince, wishing to honour the Komthurs of Szczytno and Jansbork, had arranged a great hunting party in the Kurpie wilderness. The Princess, with her ladies-in-waiting, had gone also, to give more importance to the occasion.

After supper, which Mikolaj of Dlugolas ordered to be served to the guests, Zbyszko expressed his desire to go after the Prince, and asked for a guide. The brothers of the Order, wearied by the journey, drew near the enormous fireplaces, in which were burning the entire trunks of pine trees, and said that they would go the next day. But de Lorche expressed his desire to go with Zbyszko, saying that otherwise he might miss the hunting party, which he greatly wished to see. He then approached Zbyszko, and, extending his hand, again pressed his hand three times.

CHAPTER XXII.

MIKOLAJ OF DLUGOLAS, having learned from Jendrek of Kropiwnica about the challenge, required both Zbyszko and the other knight to give him their knightly word that they would not fight without the Prince's and the Komthur's permission. If they refused, he said he would shut the gates, and not permit them to leave the castle. As Zbyszko wished to see Danusia as soon as possible, he did not resist. De Lorche, although ready to fight when necessary, was not a bloodthirsty man; he therefore swore upon his knightly honour to wait for the Prince's consent. He did this willingly, for, having heard so many songs of tournaments, he preferred to fight in the presence of the Court, the dignitaries, and the ladies; he believed that such a victory would bring greater renown, and that he would win the golden spurs more easily. As he was also anxious to become acquainted with the country and the people, he preferred a delay. Mikolaj of Dlugolas, who had long been in captivity among the Germans, and could speak their language well, began to tell him marvellous tales about the Prince's hunting parties for different kinds of beasts unknown in western countries. Zbyszko and he therefore left the castle about midnight, and went towards Przasnysz, having with them their armed retinues, and men with lanterns to protect them against the wolves.

On this side of Ciechanow there were deep forests, which, a short distance beyond Przasnysz, merged into the enormous Kurpie wilderness, which, on the west, joined the impenetrable forest of Podlasie, and, further on, Lithuania. Through these forests the Lithuanian barbarians came to Mazovia, and, in 1337, reached Ciechanow, which they burnt. De Lorche listened with the greatest interest to the tales told him by the old guide, Macko of Turoboje. He had wished to fight with the Lithuanians, whom he, like many other western

knights, had thought to be Saracens. He had come, indeed, on a crusade, wishing to secure fame and salvation. He thought that a war with the Mazovians, half-heathenish people, as he believed, would secure for him plenary pardon. He could therefore scarcely believe his own eyes, when, on reaching Mazovia, he saw churches in the towns, crosses on the towers, priests, knights with sacred signs on their armour, and the people, very daring indeed, and ready for fight, but Christian, and not more rapacious than the Germans among whom the young knight had travelled. When he was told that these people had confessed Christ for centuries, he did not know what to think of the Knights of the Cross; and when he learned that Lithuania had been baptized by the command of the late Queen, his surprise and sorrow were boundless.

Meanwhile they rode along like good friends, rendering each other small services during the intervals of refreshment and treating each other with wine. But when it appeared from the conversation between de Lorche and Macko of Turoboje, that Ulryka von Elner was not a young girl, but a married woman forty years old with six children, Zbyszko grew indignant at the foreigner for daring not merely to compare an old woman with Danusia, but to ask him to acknowledge her to be the first among women.

"Do you not think," said he to Macko, "that an evil spirit has turned his brain? Perhaps the devil is sitting in his head like a worm in a nut, and is ready to leap out on one of us during the night. We must be on our guard."

Macko of Turoboje began to look at the Lorrainer with a certain uneasiness, and at length said:

"Sometimes there are hundreds of devils in one possessed man, and if they are crowded they are glad to pass into other people. And the worst devil is one sent by a woman."

Then he turned suddenly to the knight:

"Let Jesus Christ be praised!"

"I too praise him," answered de Lorche with some astonishment.

Macko was instantly reassured.

"No, do not you see," said he, "if the devil were in him he would have foamed immediately, or he would

have been thrown to the earth, for I asked him suddenly. We can go."

They proceeded quietly. The distance between Ciechanow and Przasnysz is not great, and during the summer a knight riding a good horse can travel from one city to the other in two hours; but they rode very slowly, because of the darkness and the snow-drifts. They started after midnight, and did not arrive at the Prince's hunting-house, which was situated near the woods beyond Przasnysz, until daybreak. The wooden mansion was large, and the panes of the windows were made of glass balls. Round the mansion were many tents made of skins, and booths hastily built of the branches of pine trees. The fire shone brightly in front of the tents, and round them stood the huntsmen, who were dressed in coats made of sheepskin, foxskin, wolfskin, and bearskin, with the hair turned outside. Behind these were seen the trunks of enormous pines, with more people standing by; the great number of people, indeed, astonished the Lorrainer, who was not accustomed to see such large hunting parties.

"Your princes," said he, "go to a hunt as if to a war."

"To be sure," answered Macko of Turoboje; "they lack neither hunting implements nor people."

"What are we going to do?" interrupted Zbyszko; "they are still asleep in the mansion."

"Well, we must wait until they get up," answered Macko; "we cannot knock at the door and awaken the Prince our lord."

With these words, he conducted them to a fire, near which the Kurpie threw some wolfskins and urus-skins, and then offered them some roast meat. Hearing a foreign speech, the people began to gather round to see the German. Soon the news was spread by Zbyszko's attendants that there was a knight "from beyond the seas," and the crowd became so great that the lord of Turoboje was obliged to use his authority to shield the foreigner from their curiosity.

Zbyszko was continually looking towards the doors and windows of the mansion, and was hardly able to remain still. There was light in one window only, evidently in the kitchen, for steam came out through the gaps between the panes. At the small doors on one side of the house servants in the Prince's livery appeared from time to time, hurrying to the wells for water. These men, on

being asked if every one was still asleep, answered that the Court, wearied by the previous day's hunting, was still resting, but that breakfast was being prepared. And through the window of the kitchen there now issued the smell of roasted meat and saffron, spreading far among the fires. At length the principal door was opened, showing the interior of a brightly lit hall, and there appeared a man, whom Zbyszko immediately recognised as one of the rybats he had seen with the Princess in Krakow. Observing him, and waiting neither for Macko of Turoboje nor for de Lorche, Zbyszko rushed with such impetuosity towards the mansion that the astonished Lorrainer asked:

"What is the matter with the young knight?"

"There is nothing the matter with him," answered Macko of Turoboje; "he is in love with a damsel of the Princess's Court, and desires to see her as soon as possible."

"Ah!" answered de Lorche, putting both hands to his heart. He began to sigh so deeply that Macko shrugged his shoulders, and said to himself:

"Is it possible that he is sighing for that old woman? It must be that his senses are impaired!"

Meanwhile he conducted de Lorche into the large hall of the mansion, which was ornamented with the horns of bisons, elks, and deer, and was lighted by the large logs burning in the fireplace. In the middle of the hall stood a table covered with mugs and dishes for breakfast. There were only a few courtiers present, and with these Zbyszko talked. Macko of Turoboje introduced de Lorche to them. More courtiers entered at every moment. The majority of them were fine-looking men, with broad shoulders and fallow hair; all were dressed for hunting. Those who were acquainted with Zbyszko, and were familiar with his adventure in Krakow, greeted him as an old friend; it was evident that they liked him.

"The Princess is here," said one of them, "and Jurandowna also. You will see her soon; then you will go with us to the hunting party."

At this moment the two guests of the Prince, Knights of the Cross, entered. They were Brother Hugo von Danveld, starosta of Ortelsburg, and Siegfried von Löwe, bailiff of Jansbork. The first was quite a young man, but stout, with a face like that of a beer drunkard, with

thick, moist lips; the other was tall, with stern, but noble, features. It seemed to Zbyszko that he had seen Danveld before at the Court of Prince Witold, and that Henryk, Bishop of Plock, had thrown him from his horse during a combat in the lists. These recollections were disturbed by the entrance of Prince Janusz, whom the Knights of the Cross and the courtiers saluted. De Lorche, the komthurs, and Zbyszko also approached him, and he welcomed them cordially, but with dignity. Immediately the trumpets resounded, announcing that the Prince was about to go to breakfast. They sounded three times, and the third time a large door to the right was opened, and Princess Anna appeared, accompanied by the beautiful blonde girl, with a lute hanging over her shoulder.

Zbyszko stepped forward, and kneeled on both knees in a posture full of worship and admiration. Seeing this, those present began to whisper, for Zbyszko's action surprised the Mazovians, some of them being even scandalised. Some of the older ones said: "Surely he has learned such customs from knights living beyond the sea, or perhaps even from the heathen themselves, for there is no custom like this even among the Germans." But the younger ones said: "No wonder; she saved his life." But the Princess and Jurandowna did not recognise Zbyszko at once, because he kneeled with his back towards the fire, and his face was in the shadow. The Princess thought that it was some courtier, who, having been guilty of some offence, besought her intervention with the Prince; but Danusia, having keener sight, advanced a step, and, bending her fair head, suddenly exclaimed:

"Zbyszko!"

Then, forgetting that the whole Court and the foreign guests were looking at her, she sprang like a roe towards the young knight, and, encircling his neck with her arms, began to kiss his lips and cheeks, embracing and caressing him so long that the Mazovians laughed and the Princess drew her back.

Zbyszko then embraced the feet of the Princess. She welcomed him, and asked about Macko, whether he was alive, and whether he had accompanied Zbyszko. Finally, when the servants brought in the warm dishes, she said to Zbyszko:

"You will serve us, dear little knight, and perhaps not only now at this table, but for ever."

Danusia blushed and looked confused, but she was so beautiful that not only Zbyszko, but all the knights present were filled with pleasure. The commander of Szczytno placed the palm of his hands to his thick, moist lips. De Lorche was amazed, and asked:

"By Saint James of Compostella, who is that girl?"

In reply, the commander of Szczytno, who was short, stood on his toes and whispered in the ear of the knight of Lorraine:

"The devil's daughter!"

De Lorche looked at him; then he frowned, and began to say through his nose:

"A knight who talks against beauty is not gallant."

"I wear golden spurs, and I am a monk," answered Hugo von Danveld proudly.

The Lorrainer dropped his head; but after a while he said:

"I am a relative of the Princess of Brabant."

"Pax! Pax!" answered the Knight of the Cross. "Honour to the mighty knights and friends of the Order, from whom you, sir, shall soon receive your golden spurs. I do not disparage the beauty of the girl; but listen, and I will tell you who her father is."

He did not, however, have time to tell him, for at that moment Prince Janusz seated himself at the table, and, having previously learned from the bailiff of Jansbork of the mighty relatives of de Lorche, he invited him to sit beside him. The Princess and Danusia were seated opposite. Zbyszko stood, as he did in Krakow, behind their chairs, serving them. Danusia held her head as low as possible over the plate, for she was bashful. Zbyszko looked with ecstasy at her little head and rosy cheeks, and he felt his love overflowing his bosom like a river. He could feel her sweet kisses on his face, his eyes, and his lips. Formerly, she had kissed him as a sister kisses a brother, and he had received the kisses as from a child. Now, Danusia seemed to him older and more mature—she had, in fact, grown and blossomed. Love was so much talked about in her presence that, as a bud warmed by the sun takes colour and blooms, so her eyes had opened to love. Thus there was a certain charm in her now, which she had formerly lacked, and an intoxicating attraction radiated from her presence, like the warm beams of the sun or the fragrance of the rose.

Zbyszko felt this but could not explain it to himself. He even forgot that at table it was his duty to serve. He did not see that the courtiers were laughing at him and Danusia. Neither did he notice de Lorche's face, which expressed great astonishment, or the covetous eyes of the starosta of Szczytno, who gazed constantly at Danusia. He was aroused only when the trumpets again sounded to announce that it was time to go into the forest, and when the Princess Anna Danuta, turning towards him, said:

"You will accompany us; you will then have an opportunity to speak to Danusia."

Having said this, she went out with Danusia to dress for the ride. Zbyszko rushed to the courtyard, where the horses were standing, all covered with frost. There was no longer a great crowd, for the men whose duty it was to hem in the beasts had already gone forward into the thicket with the nets. The fires were quenched; the day was bright, but cold. Soon the Prince appeared and mounted his horse; behind him rode an attendant with a crossbow and a spear so long and heavy that few could have handled it, although the Prince used it very easily. The Prince was also attended by two men, who were prepared to help him in any emergency. They had shoulders like the trunks of oak trees. De Lorche gazed at them with amazement.

Meanwhile the Princess and Danusia came out, both with hoods made of the skins of white weasels. This worthy daughter of Kiejstut could handle a bow better than a needle, and her attendants carried a crossbow behind her. Zbyszko, having knelt on the snow, extended the palm of his hand, on which the Princess rested her foot while mounting her horse; he then lifted Danusia into her saddle, and all set out. The retinue, which formed in a long column, turned to the right on leaving the mansion, and then began slowly to enter the forest.

The Princess turned to Zbyszko and said:

"Why do not you talk? Speak to her."

Zbyszko, although thus encouraged, remained silent; but after quite a long interval he said:

"Danusia!"

"What, Zbyszko?"

"I love you!"

Here he again stopped, searching for words which he could not find; although he had knelt before the girl like a foreign knight, and showed her his respect in every way, still he could not express his love in words. He therefore said:

"My love for you is so great that it stops my breath."

"I also love you, Zbyszko!" said she hastily.

"Ah, my dearest! Ah, my sweet one!" exclaimed Zbyszko. "Ah!" Then he was silent, full of blissful emotion. But the good-hearted Princess again helped them.

"Tell her," said she, "how lonesome you were without her, and when you come to a thicket you may kiss her. That will be the best proof of your love."

So he began to tell how lonely he had felt without her in Bogdaniec while taking care of Macko and visiting among the neighbours. But the cunning fellow did not say a word about Jagienka. When the first thicket separated them from the courtiers and the guests he bent towards her and kissed her.

During the winter there are no leaves on the hazel bushes, and Hugo von Danveld and de Lorche saw him kiss the girl. Some of the courtiers also saw him, and they began to say among themselves:

"He kissed her in the presence of the Princess! Our lady will surely prepare the wedding for them soon."

"He is a daring fellow, but Jurand's blood is warm also!"

"They are flint-stone and fire-steel, although the girl looks so quiet. Do not be afraid; there will be some sparks from them yet!"

Thus they talked and laughed; but the commander of Szczytno turned his evil face towards de Lorche and asked:

"Sir, would not you like some Merlin to change you by his magic power into that knight?"

"Would you, sir?" asked de Lorche.

To this the Knight of the Cross, who evidently was filled with jealousy, drew the reins of his horse impatiently and exclaimed:

"Upon my soul!"

But instantly recovering his composure, he bent his head and said:

"I am a monk, and have made a vow of chastity."

He glanced sharply at the Lorrainer, fearing to perceive a smile on his face, for in this respect the Order had a bad reputation among the people, while among all the monks Hugo von Danveld had the worst. A few years previous he had been vice-bailiff of Sambia. There were so many complaints against him there that, notwithstanding the tolerance with which the Order looked upon similar occurrences in Marienburg, the Grand Master was obliged to remove him, and appoint him commander of the garrison in Szczytno. Afterwards, he was sent to the Prince's Court on some secret mission, and seeing the beautiful Jurandowna, he conceived a violent passion for her, to which even Danusia's extreme youth was no check. But Danveld also knew to what family the girl belonged, and Jurand's name was united in his memory with a painful recollection.

De Lorche began to question him:

"Sir, you called that beautiful girl the devil's daughter; why did you call her so?"

Danveld began to relate the story of Zlotorja: how, during the restoration of the castle, they captured the Prince, with the Court; how, during that fight, Jurandowna's mother died; and how since that time Jurand had avenged himself on all Knights of the Cross. Danveld's hatred was apparent during the narration, for he had also personal reasons for hating Jurand. Two years before, during an encounter, he had met Jurand; but the mere sight of the dreadful "Boar of Spychow" had so terrified him for the first time in his life that he deserted two of his relatives and his retinue, and fled to Szczytno. For this cowardly act the Grand Marshal of the Order brought a knightly suit against him. He swore that his horse had become unmanageable, and had carried him away from the battlefield; but that incident closed his way to all higher positions in the Order. Danveld, of course, did not say anything to de Lorche about that occurrence, but instead he complained so bitterly about Jurand's atrocities and the audacity of the whole Polish nation, that the Lorrainer could not comprehend all he was saying, and said:

"But we are in the country of the Mazovians, and not of the Poles."

"It is an independent principality, but the same nation," answered the commander. "They feel the same

hatred against the Order. May God permit German swords to exterminate this whole race!"

"You are right, sir. I never heard even among the heathen of such an unlawful deed as the building of a castle on the land of another, as this Prince tried to do," said de Lorche.

"He built the castle against us, but Zlоторja is situated on his land, not on ours."

"Then glory be to Christ that He granted you the victory! What was the result of the war?"

"There was no war then!"

"What was the meaning of your victory at Zlоторja?"

"God favoured us. The Prince had no army with him, but only his Court and the women."

Here de Lorche looked at the Knight of the Cross with amazement.

"What! During a time of peace you attacked the women and the Prince, who was building a castle on his own land?"

"For the glory of the Order and of Christendom."

"And that terrible knight is seeking vengeance only for the death of his young wife, killed by you during the time of peace?"

"Whosoever raises his hand against a Knight of the Cross is a son of darkness."

Hearing this, de Lorche became grave; but he did not have time to answer Danveld, for they arrived at a large, snow-covered glade in the woods, on which the Prince and his courtiers had dismounted.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE foresters, under the direction of the chief huntsman, placed the hunters in a long row at the edge of the forest in such a manner that, while being hidden themselves, they faced the glade. Nets were fastened along the sides of the glade, and behind these were the men whose duty it was to turn the animals towards the hunters, or to kill them with spears if they became entangled in the nets. The Prince was standing in the middle of a small ravine, which extended over the entire width of the glade. The head huntsman, Mrokota of Mocarzew, had chosen that position for him, as he knew that the largest beasts would pass through this ravine. The Prince had a crossbow, and leaning on a tree beside him was a heavy spear; a little behind him stood his two gigantic "defenders," with axes on their shoulders, and holding crossbows ready to be handed to him. The Princess and Jurandowna did not dismount; the Prince would not allow them to do so, because of the peril from urus and bisons. De Lorche, although invited by the Prince to take a position at his right hand, asked permission to remain with the ladies for their defence. Zbyszko drove his spear into the snow, put his crossbow on his back, and stood by Danusia's horse, whispering to her, and sometimes kissing her. He desisted only when Mrokota of Mocarzew, who, in the forest, reproved even the Prince himself, ordered him to be silent.

Meanwhile, far in the depths of the forest, the horns of the Kurpie were heard, and the piercing sound of a bugle answered from the glade; then perfect silence followed. The hunters fixed their eyes on the snow-covered glade, where only the wind stirred the bushes, and asked themselves what kind of animals would first appear. But they had long to wait, for the men who were driving the animals towards the glade had encircled a very large

expanse of the forest, and were therefore so far away that the hunters did not even hear the baying of the dogs, which had been freed from their leashes immediately after the horns sounded.

Presently some wolves appeared on the edge of the forest, but, seeing the people, they again plunged into the thicket, evidently searching for another exit. Some boars then emerged from the wilderness and began to run in a long black line through the snowy space, looking in the distance like domestic swine. They stopped and listened, then turned and listened again. Turning towards the nets, they scented the men, and went off in the direction of the hunters, snorting and approaching more and more carefully; at length the clatter of the iron cranks of the crossbows and the snarl of the bolts resounded, and the first blood spotted the white snow.

The glade of the wood was soon covered with the dead bodies of many different kinds of animals; but the hunt was not yet ended. The most interesting and, at the same time, the most perilous moment was yet to come, for the huntsmen had met a herd of urus and bison. The bearded bulls marched at the head of the herd, bellowing and holding their heads near the ground, and often stopping as if considering where to attack. The huntsmen shouted, and their cries were followed by similar shouts from all sides; the horns and fifes sounded, and the forest reverberated in its remotest recesses. Meanwhile the dogs of the Kurpie rushed towards the glade with a tremendous baying. The herd, which had hitherto been moving cautiously, now scattered in a mad rush all over the glade. One of the bison, an enormous old yellow bull, rushed towards the huntsmen standing on one side; then, seeing horses in the bushes, it stopped, bellowed, and began to plough the earth with its horns, as if inciting itself to fight.

Seeing this, the men began to shout still more, but among the hunters frightened voices were heard exclaiming: "The Princess! The Princess! Save the Princess!" Zbyszko seized his spear, which he had driven into the ground behind him, and rushed to the edge of the forest. He was followed by a few Lithuanians, who were ready to die in defence of Kiejstut's daughter; but all at once the crossbow creaked in the hands of the lady, the bolt whistled, and, passing over the animal's head, struck it in the neck.

"He is hit!" exclaimed the Princess; "he will not escape."

But suddenly, with such a dreadful bellowing that the frightened horses reared, the bison rushed right upon the lady; but at the same moment, with no less impetuosity, de Lorche rushed from beneath the trees, and, leaning over his horse with his spear couched as in a tournament, attacked the animal.

Those close at hand saw the spear instantly plunged into the animal's neck, bend immediately like a bow, and break into small pieces; then the enormous horned head disappeared entirely under the belly of de Lorche's horse, and the charger and his rider were tossed into the air.

From the forest the huntsmen rushed to the help of the foreign knight. Zbyszko, who cared most for the Princess's and Danusia's safety, arrived first, and drove his spear under the bison's shoulder blade. He delivered the blow with such force that the spear, at a sudden turn of the bison, broke in his hands, and he himself fell with his face on the ground.

"He is dead! He is dead!" cried the Mazovians, who rushed to help him.

The bull's head covered Zbyszko, and pressed him to the ground. The two powerful "defenders" of the Prince came up, but they were too late; fortunately the Czech Hlawa, who had been given to Zbyszko by Jagienka, outstripped them, and, seizing his broad-axe with both hands, cut the bison's bent neck near the horns.

The blow was so powerful that the animal fell, as though struck by a thunderbolt, with its head severed from the neck, its enormous body falling upon Zbyszko. Both "defenders" pulled it away quickly. The Princess and Danusia, having dismounted, arrived at the side of the wounded youth.

Zbyszko, pale and covered with his own and the animal's blood, tried to rise; but he staggered, fell on his knees, and, leaning on his hands, could only pronounce one word:

"Danusia!"

Then the blood gushed from his mouth. Danusia grasped him by the shoulders, but, unable to hold him, began to cry for help. The huntsmen rubbed him with snow, and poured wine into his mouth; then the head huntsman, Mrokota of Mocarzew, ordered them to cover

him with a mantle, and staunch the blood with soft spunk from the trees.

"He will live if his ribs and backbone are not broken," said he, turning to the Princess.

Meanwhile some of the ladies of the Court, with the help of other huntsmen, were attending to de Lorche. They turned him over, searching in his armour for holes or dents made by the horns of the bull; but, except traces of the snow, which had entered between the joints of the iron plates, they could find nothing. The urus had avenged himself chiefly on the horse, which lay dead beside the knight; as for de Lorche, he was not seriously injured. He had fainted, and his right hand was sprained. When they took off his helm and poured some wine into his mouth, he opened his eyes, and, seeing the sorrowful faces of two pretty ladies bending over him, said in German:

"I am sure I am in paradise already, with the angels bending over me."

The ladies did not understand what he said; but being glad to see him open his eyes and speak, they smiled, and, with the huntsmen's help, raised him from the ground. Feeling the pain in his right hand, he moaned, and leaned with the left on the shoulder of one of the "angels"; for a while he stood motionless, fearing to take a step, for he felt weak. Glancing round, he perceived the yellow body of the urus; he also saw Danusia wringing her hands and Zbyszko lying on a mantle.

"Is that the knight who rushed to help me?" he asked. "Is he alive?"

"He is very severely injured," answered a courtier, who could speak German.

"Henceforth I mean to fight not with him, but for him!" said the Lorrainer.

The Prince, who was near Zbyszko, now approached de Lorche, and began to praise him for defending the Princess and the other ladies, and perhaps saving their lives by his bold deed; for which, besides receiving the knightly reward, he would be renowned not only then, but in all future generations.

De Lorche's heart was filled with joy when he heard the Prince's words. He knew that a knight who could say, at the Burgundian Court or the Court of Brabant, that he had saved the life of the Princess of Mazovia during a hunting party, would be famous for ever.

Zbyszko became conscious, and smiled at Danusia. Then he fainted again. The huntsmen, seeing how his hands were clenched and his mouth remained open, said to one another that he would not live; but the more experienced Kurpie declared that the urus's horn had slipped between the knight's ribs, and that, although one or two of his ribs might be broken, the backbone was not; for if it were he could not rise. They pointed out also that as Zbyszko had fallen in a snow-drift, that had possibly saved him, for the animal, when pressing him with his horns, could not entirely crush his chest or his backbone, because of the softness of the ground.

Unfortunately, the Prince's physician, Father Wyszoniek of Dziewanna, was not with the hunting party, as he was busy in the castle making wafers. The Czech had at once rushed to bring him, and meanwhile the Kurpie carried Zbyszko towards the Prince's mansion. The Knight of the Cross, Hugo von Danveld, helped Danusia to mount her horse, and then, riding beside her and closely following the men who were carrying Zbyszko, said in Polish in a muffled voice, so that she alone could hear him:

"In Szczytno I have a marvellous balm, which I received from a hermit living in the Hercynski forest; I can bring it to you in three days."

"God will reward you!" answered Danusia.

"God rewards every charitable deed; but will you reward me also?"

"What reward can I give you?"

The Knight of the Cross approached, evidently intending to say something further; but he hesitated, and after a while said:

"In the Order, besides the brothers there are also sisters. One of them will bring the healing balm, and then we will speak of reward."

CHAPTER XXIV.

FATHER WYSZONIEK dressed Zbyszko's wounds, and stated that only one rib was broken, but that the first day could not decide whether the sick man would live, for he could not yet ascertain whether the heart had been injured or not. De Lorche was so ill towards morning that he also was obliged to take to bed. The Princess, Danusia, and some of the ladies of the Court nursed the sick men, and prepared different ointments and potions according to the prescriptions of Father Wyszoniek. But Zbyszko was very severely injured, and from time to time blood gushed from his mouth. He was conscious, however, and on the second day, although very weak, having learned from Danusia to whom he owed his life, he called Hlawa in order to thank and reward him.

"I swore to my lady," said Hlawa, "on my honour as a wloodyka, that I would protect you; I will therefore do so without reward. You are indebted to her for your life."

Zbyszko did not answer, but began to breathe heavily. The Czech was silent for a while, and then said:

"If you wish me to hasten to Bogandiec I will go. Perhaps you will be glad to see the old lord, for God only knows whether you will recover."

"What does Father Wyszoniek say?" asked Zbyszko.

"Father Wyszoniek says that he will know when the new moon comes. There are four days until the new moon."

"Ah! Then you need not go to Bogdaniec, for I shall either be dead or well before my uncle can come."

"Could you not send a letter to Bogdaniec? Sanderus will write one. Then they will know about you, and will order a mass for you."

"Let me rest now, for I am very ill. If I die, you will return to Zgorzelice, and tell how everything happened;

then they can order a mass. I suppose they will bury me here, or in Ciechanow."

"I think they will bury you in Ciechanow, or in Przasnysz. I heard that the Prince intends to return with the Court to Ciechanow in two days' time, and then to Warsaw."

"They would not leave me here alone," answered Zbyszko.

He conjectured rightly, for that same day the Princess asked the Prince's permission to remain in the house in the wilderness, with Danusia and the ladies-in-waiting, and also with Father Wyszoniek, who was opposed to carrying Zbyszko to Przasnysz. At the end of two days de Lorche felt better, and was able to leave his bed; but, learning that the ladies intended to remain, he stayed also, in order to accompany them on their journey, and defend them in case the "Saracens" should attack them. He had been among the Knights of the Cross so long, that, notwithstanding all he had heard in Mazovia of the baptism of the Lithuanians and the union of the crowns on the head of one ruler, he could not believe that any good was to be expected of the Lithuanians.

Meanwhile an incident occurred which cast a shadow between Prince Janusz and his guests. One day, before the departure of the Court, Brother Gottfried and Brother Rotgier, who had remained in Ciechanow, came, accompanied by de Fourcy, who was a bearer of bad news to the Knights of the Cross. There were some foreign guests at the Court of the commander of the Knights of the Cross in Lubowa; they included, besides de Fourcy, Herr von Bergow and Herr Meineger, both belonging to families which had rendered great services to the Order. Having heard many reports of Jurand of Spychow, they determined to draw the famous warrior into the open field, and ascertain for themselves whether he was really as terrible as had been represented. The commander opposed the plan, giving as his reason that there was peace between the Order and the Mazovian princes; but, perhaps hoping thus to get rid of his terrible neighbour, he at length not only connived at the expedition, but even furnished the armed knechts. The knights sent a challenge to Jurand, who immediately accepted it, under the condition that they should send away the soldiers, and that three of them should fight with him

and two of his companions on the boundaries of Szlonsk and Spychow. But when they refused to send away the knechts or to retire from the land belonging to Spychow, he suddenly fell upon them, exterminated the knechts, pierced Herr Meineger terribly with a spear, took Herr von Bergow into captivity, and threw him into the dungeon of Spychow. De Fourcy alone escaped, and after three days' wandering in the Mazovian forests, learning from some pitch-burners that there were some brothers of the Order in Ciechanow, he had succeeded in reaching them. He and the brothers of the Order now made a complaint to the Prince, asking for the punishment of Jurand, and for an order for the deliverance of Herr von Bergow.

This news disturbed the good understanding between the Prince and his guests, for not only the two newly arrived brothers, but Hugo von Danveld and Siegfried von Loewe also, began to beseech the Prince to render justice to the Order. Hugo von Danveld, having his own grievance against Jurand, the remembrance of which burned him with shame and grief, asked for vengeance almost threateningly.

"The complaint will go to the Grand Master," he said; "and if we be not able to get justice from Your Highness, he will obtain it himself, even if the whole of Mazovia help that robber."

But the Prince, although naturally good-tempered, became angry, and said:

"What sort of justice do you ask for? Had Jurand attacked you first, then I would surely punish him. But your people were the first to begin hostilities. Your commander gave the knechts permission to go on the expedition. Jurand only accepted the challenge, and asked that the soldiers should be sent away. Shall I punish him for that? You attacked that terrible man, of whom every one stands in dread, and voluntarily brought calamity upon yourselves. What, then, do you want? Shall I order him not to defend himself when it pleases you to attack him?"

"It was not the Order that attacked him, but its guests, foreign knights," answered Hugo.

"The Order is responsible for its guests, and besides, the knechts from the garrison of Lubowa were there."

"Could the commander permit his guests to be slaughtered?"

Here the Prince turned to Siegfried and said :

"Take heed lest your wiles offend God!"

But the stern Siegfried answered:

"Herr von Bergow must be released from captivity; the men of his family were high dignitaries in the Order, and rendered important services to the Cross."

"And Meineger's death must be avenged," added Hugo von Danveld.

Thereupon the Prince rose, and walked threateningly towards the Germans; but after a while, apparently remembering that they were his guests, he restrained his anger, placed his hand on Siegfried's shoulder, and said:

"Listen; you wear a cross upon your mantle, therefore answer upon that cross according to your conscience! Was Jurand right or was he not?"

"Herr von Bergow must be released from prison," answered Siegfried von Löwe.

There was a moment's silence; then the Prince said:

"God grant me patience!"

Siegfried continued sharply, his words cutting like a sword:

"The wrong which was done to us in the persons of our guests is only one more occasion for complaint. From the time the Order was founded, neither in Palestine, nor in Siedmiogrod, nor among the heathenish Lithuanians has any man wronged us so much as that robber from Spychow. Your Highness! We ask for justice and vengeance, not for one wrong, but for thousands; not for blood shed once, but for years of such deeds, for which fire from heaven ought to burn that nest of wickedness and cruelty. Whose are the moans that entreat God for vengeance? Ours! Whose are the tears? Ours! We have complained in vain. Justice has never been given us!"

Hearing this, Prince Janusz began to nod his head, and said:

"Hah! Formerly the Knights of the Cross were received hospitably in Spychow. Jurand was not your foe until his wife had died upon your halter. And how often have you attacked him first, wishing to kill him, as in this last case, because he had challenged and defeated your knights? How often have you sent assassins after him, or shot at him with crossbows from the forest? He attacked you, it is

true, because vengeance burns within him; but have not you attacked peaceful people in Mazovia? Have not you taken their herds, burned their houses, and murdered the men, women, and children? And when I complained to the Grand Master, he sent me this reply from Marienburg: 'The usual border frolics.' Let me be in peace! Was it not you who captured me when I was without arms, during a time of peace, on my own land? Had it not been for your fear of Jagiello, the mighty King in Krakow, probably I should have had to groan in captivity until now. Who ought to complain? With such gratitude you repaid me, who belonged to the family of your benefactors. Let me be in peace! It is not you who have the right to talk of justice!"

On hearing these words, the Knights of the Cross looked at each other impatiently, angry because the Prince had mentioned the occurrence at Zlotorja in the presence of de Fourcy. Hugo von Danveld, therefore, wishing to end the talk about it, said:

"That was a mistake, Your Highness, and we made amends for it, not from fear of the King in Krakow, but for the sake of justice; and with regard to the border frolics, the Grand Master cannot be held responsible, for there are some restless spirits on every frontier."

"You say this yourself, and still you ask for the punishment of Jurand. What, then, do you wish?"

"Justice and punishment!"

The Prince clenched his bony fists, and repeated:

"God grant me patience!"

"Your Princely Majesty must also remember," said Danveld further, "that our wantons only wrong lay folk, who do not belong to the German race, but your men raise their hand against the German Order, and for this reason they offend our Saviour Himself."

"Listen!" said the Prince. "Do not talk of God; you cannot deceive Him!"

Then, placing his hands on the knight's shoulders, he shook him so violently as to startle him. He relented immediately, and said mildly:

"If it be true that your guests attacked Jurand first and did not send away the soldiers, I will not blame him; but had Jurand really accepted the challenge?"

Having said this, he looked at de Fourcy, daring him to deny it; but the latter, not wishing to lie, answered:

"He asked us to send our soldiers away, and to fight three against three."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Upon my honour! Herr von Bergow and I agreed, but Meineger did not consent."

Here the Prince interrupted:

"Commander of Szczytno! You know better than any one else that Jurand would not miss a challenge."

Then, turning to all present, he said:

"If one of you will challenge Jurand to a fight on horseback or on foot, I give my permission. If he be taken prisoner or killed, then Herr von Bergow will be released without paying any ransom. Do not ask me for anything else, for I will not grant it."

There was a deep silence. Hugo von Danveld, Siegfried von Löwe, Brother Rotgier, and Brother Gottfried, although brave, knew the terrible Lord of Spychow too well to dare to challenge him to mortal combat. Only a foreigner from a distant country, like de Lorche or de Fourcy, would do so; but de Lorche was not present during the conversation, and de Fourcy was still too frightened.

"I have seen him once," he muttered, "and I do not wish to see him any more."

Siegfried von Löwe said:

"It is forbidden the monks to fight in single combat, except by special permission from the Grand Master and the Grand Marshal; but I do not ask for permission for a combat, but for the release of von Bergow and the punishment by death of Jurand."

"You do not make the laws in this country."

"Our Grand Master will know how to administer justice."

"Your Grand Master has nothing to do with Mazovia."

"The Emperor and the whole German nation will help him."

"The King of Poland will help me, and he is more powerful than the German Emperor."

"Does Your Highness desire a war with the Order?"

"If I desired a war, I should not wait for you to come to Mazovia, but would go to you. You need not threaten me, for I am not afraid of you."

"What shall I say to the Grand Master?"

"He has not asked you anything. Tell him what you please."

"Then we will avenge ourselves."

Thereupon the Prince stretched forth his arm and began to shake his finger close to the knight's face.

"Be still!" said he angrily; "be still! I have given you permission to challenge Jurand; but if you dare to invade this country with the army of the Order, then I will attack you, and you will stay here not as a guest but as a prisoner!"

Evidently his patience was entirely exhausted, for he threw his cap violently on the table and left the room, slamming the door. The Knights of the Cross turned pale, and de Fourcy looked at them askance.

"What will happen now?" asked Brother Rotgier, who was the first to break the silence.

Hugo von Danveld turned to de Fourcy, and, menacing him with his fists, said:

"Why did you tell him that you attacked Jurand?"

"Because it is true!"

"You should have lied."

"I came here to fight and not to lie."

"Well, you fought well, indeed!"

"And you? Did not you run away from Jurand of Spychow?"

"Pax!" said von Loewe. "This knight is a guest of the Order."

"It does not matter what he said," added Brother Gottfried. "They would not punish Jurand without a trial, and in the court the truth would come out."

"What is to be done now?" repeated Brother Rotgier.

There was a moment of silence; then the sturdy and virulent Siegfried von Loewe spoke.

"We must finish once for all with that bloody dog!" said he. "Herr von Bergow must be released from his fetters. We will gather the garrisons from Szczytno, Insburk, and Lubowa; we will summon the Chelminsk nobility, and attack Jurand. It is time to settle with him!"

"We cannot do so without permission from the Grand Master."

"If we succeed, the Grand Master will be pleased!" said Brother Gottfried.

"But if we do not succeed? If the Prince go against us?"

"He will not if there is peace between him and the Order."

"There is peace, but we are about to violate it. Our garrisons will not be sufficient to fight against the Mazovians."

"Then the Grand Master will help us, and there will be war."

Danveld frowned again and became thoughtful.

"No! no!" said he after a while. "If we be successful, the Grand Master will be pleased. Envoys will be sent to the Prince; there will be negotiations; and we shall go scot-free. But in case of defeat, the Order will not intercede for us, and will not declare war. Another Grand Master is necessary for that. The Polish King is behind the Prince, and the Grand Master will not quarrel with him."

"But we have taken the province of Dobrzyn; it is evident that we are not afraid of Krakow."

"There was a pretext—Opolczyk. We took it, apparently in pledge, and then——" Here he looked round and said quietly:

"I heard in Marienburg that, if they threaten us with war, we will return the province."

"Ah!" said Brother Rotgier, "if we had Markward Salzbach with us, or Schomberg, who killed Witold's whelps, he would find some remedy against Jurand. Witold was the King's viceroy, and a Grand Duke. Notwithstanding that, Schomberg was not punished. He killed Witold's children, and went scot-free! Verily, there is great lack among us of people who can find a remedy for everything."

Hugo von Danveld placed his elbows on the table, leaned his head on his hands, and became plunged in deep thought. Then his eyes glistened; he wiped his moist, thick lips with the upper part of his hand, as was his custom, and said:

"May the moment in which you, pious brother, mentioned the name of the valiant Schomberg, be blessed."

"Why? Have you found a remedy?" asked Siegfried von Löwe.

"Speak quickly!" exclaimed Brother Gottfried.

"Listen!" said Hugo. "Jurand has a daughter here, his only child, whom he loves dearly."

"Yes, he has. We know her. The Princess Anna Danuta loves her also."

"Yes! Listen, then: If you capture this girl, Jurand

will give as a ransom for her, not only von Bergow, but all his prisoners, himself and Spychow!"

"By the blood of Saint Boniface shed in Duchum!" exclaimed Brother Gottfried; "it would be as you say."

They were silent, as if frightened by the boldness and the difficulties of the enterprise. But after a while Brother Rotgier turned towards Siegfried von Loewe, and said:

"Your judgment and experience are equal to your bravery; what do you think of this plan?"

"I think that the matter is worthy of consideration."

"But," continued Rotgier, "the girl is a lady-in-waiting with the Princess, who loves her as if she were her own daughter. Think, pious brother, what an uproar will arise."

But Hugo von Danveld began to laugh.

"You have said yourself that Schomberg poisoned or strangled Witold's whelps, and what happened to him? They will raise an uproar about anything we do; but if we send Jurand in chains to the Grand Master, then it is certain that we may expect reward rather than punishment."

"Yes," said von Loewe, "there is a good opportunity for an attack. The Prince is going away, and Anna Danuta will remain here alone with her Court. However, it is a serious matter to invade the Prince's house in time of peace. The Prince's house is not Spychow. It will be the same thing that happened in Zlоторja! Again complaints against the Order will go to all kings and to the Pope; again that cursed Jagiello will threaten us and the Grand Master. You know him. He is glad to take hold of anything he can, but he does not wish for war with Jagiello. Yes, there will be a great uproar in all the provinces of Mazovia and Poland."

"In the meanwhile, Jurand's bones will whiten on a hook," answered Brother Hugo. "Then we do not need to take his daughter from the Prince's mansion."

"But we cannot do it from Ciechanow either; for there, besides these noblemen, there are three hundred archers."

"No! But Jurand can become ill and send for his daughter. Then the Princess would not prevent her going; and if the girl be lost on the road, who will accuse you or me and say to us: 'You captured her!'"

"Pshaw!" answered von Loewe impatiently. "You must first make Jurand sick, and then make him summon the girl."

At this Hugo smiled triumphantly, and answered: "I have a goldsmith who, having been driven from Marienburg for theft, has settled in Szczytno and is able to make a seal. I have also people who, although our bondsmen, came from the Mazovian country. Do you understand me?"

"I understand!" cried Brother Gottfried.

And Rotgier raised his hands and said:

"May God bless you, pious brother, for neither Markward Salzbach nor Schomberg could have found a better expedient."

Then he half closed his eyes, as if he saw something far away.

"I see Jurand," said he, "with a rope round his neck, standing at the Gdansk gate in Marienburg, and our knechts kicking him."

"And the girl will become a servant of the Order," said Hugo.

Hearing this, von Loewe turned his severe eyes on Danveld; but the latter again rubbed his lips with the upper part of his hand, and said:

"And now to Szczytno as soon as may be!"

Before starting on the journey to Szczytno, the four brothers of the Order and de Fourcy went to bid the Prince and the Princess adieu. It was not a very friendly farewell, but the Prince, not wishing to act contrary to the old Polish custom, which did not permit guests to depart with empty hands, made each brother a present of some beautiful marten fur and one mark of silver. They received the presents with great pleasure, assuring the Prince that, being brothers of an Order, and having made a solemn promise to live in poverty, they would not retain the money for themselves, but would distribute it among the poor, whom they would recommend to pray for the Prince's health, fame, and future salvation.

The Mazovians laughed in their sleeves at such an assurance, for they knew very well how rapacious the Order was, and, still better, what liars the Knights of the Cross were. It was a popular saying in Mazovia: "As

the skunk smells, so the Knight of the Cross lies." The Prince waved his hand in reply to their thanks, and when they had gone he said that by the intervention of the Knights of the Cross, one might go to heaven as swiftly as the crawfish walks.

While taking leave of the Princess, as Siegfried von Loewe was kissing her hand, Hugo von Danveld had approached Danusia, placed his hand on her head, and, caressing her, said:

"Our commandment is to return good for evil, and even to love our enemy; I will therefore send a sister of the Order here, and she will bring you the healing balm."

"How can I thank you for it," answered Danusia.

"Be a friend of the Order and of the monks."

De Fourcy observed this conversation, and, at the same time, he was struck with the beauty of the young girl. So, as they were travelling towards Szczytno, he asked:

"Who is that beautiful young lady of the Court with whom you talked as we took leave of the Princess?"

"Jurand's daughter!" answered the Knight of the Cross.

De Fourcy was surprised.

"The same whom you propose to capture?"

"Yes. When we capture her, Jurand is ours."

"Evidently everything is not bad that comes from Jurand. It will be worth while to guard such a prisoner."

"Do you think it will be easier to fight with her than with Jurand?"

"I mean that I think as you do. The father is a foe to the Order, yet you spoke words as sweet as honey to the daughter, and besides you promised to send her balm."

Apparently Hugo von Danveld felt the need of justification before Siegfried von Loewe, who, although no better than the others, observed the austere laws of the Order, and very often reproved the other brothers.

"I promised her the balm," said Hugo, "for that young knight who was injured by the bison, and to whom she is betrothed. If they make an outcry when the girl is captured, then we will tell them that we did not wish to harm her, and the best proof of this will be that we sent her some medicine out of Christian mercy."

"Very well," said von Loewe. "Only we must send some one whom we can trust."

"I will send a pious woman entirely faithful to the

Order. I will command her to look and to listen. When our people, apparently sent by Jurand, arrive, they will find the road already prepared."

"It will be difficult to find such people."

"No; in our province the people speak the same language. There are in our city—pshaw! even among the knechts of the garrison—men who left Mazovia to escape the law. It is true they are thieves and robbers, but they fear no one, and are ready to do anything. To these men I will promise a large reward if they succeed; if they fail, a rope."

"But suppose they betray us?"

"They will not betray us, for in Mazovia every one of them deserves to be hanged. Only, we must give them decent clothes, so that they will be taken for Jurand's servants, and we must get the principal thing—a letter with Jurand's seal."

"We must foresee everything," said Brother Rotgier. "Jurand will probably see the Prince, and justify himself on account of the last war. If he is in Ciechanow, he will go to see his daughter. It may happen that our men, when they go to capture Jurandowna, will come in contact with Jurand himself."

"The men whom I am going to choose are sharp. They will know that they will be hanged if they come in contact with Jurand. It will be to their own interest not to meet him."

"But they may be captured."

"Then we will deny them and the letter. Who can prove that we sent them? And then if there be no outrage there will be no outcry, and it will not harm the Order if the Mazovians cut several scoundrels in pieces."

"I do not understand your policy," said Brother Gottfried, the youngest of the monks, "or your fear that it may become known that the girl was carried off by our command. For, if we have her in our possession, we shall be obliged to send some one to Jurand saying: 'Your daughter is with us; if you wish her to be set at liberty, deliver up von Bergow and yourself in exchange for her.' You cannot do otherwise, and then it will be known that we ordered the girl to be carried off."

"That is true!" said de Fourcy, who did not like the whole affair. "Why should we hide that which must come out?"

But Hugo von Danveld began to laugh, and, turning to Brother Gottfried, asked:

"How long have you worn the white mantle?"

"It will be six years in the first week after the feast of the Holy Trinity."

"When you have worn it six years longer you will understand the affairs of the Order better. Jurand knows us better than you do. We will tell him: 'Your daughter is watched by Brother Schomberg; if you say a word, remember what happened to Witold's children!'"

"And then?"

"Then von Bergow will be free, and the Order also will be rid of Jurand."

"No!" exclaimed Brother Rotgier; "everything is planned so wisely that God ought to bless our enterprise."

"God blesses all deeds whose purpose is the good of the Order," said the gloomy Siegfried von Loewe.

Then they rode on silently, with their retinue before them to open the way, for the road was covered with a heavy snow, which had fallen during the night. The day was cloudy but warm, and the horses were steaming. From the forest, flocks of crows flew towards the villages, filling the air with their gloomy cawing.

De Fourcy remained a little behind the Knights of the Cross, and rode along in deep thought. He had been the guest of the Order for several years; he had taken part in the expedition against the Zmudz, and had distinguished himself by great bravery. Everywhere he had been received as the Knights of the Cross knew how to receive knights from distant lands; he became very strongly attached to them, and, not being rich, he had resolved to join their ranks. Having just arrived at Lubowa with the rich von Bergow, and having heard of Jurand, he had desired very much to fight with the man who was regarded with such general dread. The arrival of Meineger, who was always victorious, had precipitated the expedition. The commander of Lubowa furnished the men for it, but meanwhile he told them so much, not only about Jurand's cruelty, but also about his cunning and treachery, that when Jurand asked them to send away the soldiers, they refused to do so, fearing that he would surround and exterminate them, or else capture them and throw them into the dungeons of Spychow. Jurand, thinking that they cared less for a knightly fight than for plunder,

had straightway attacked them and defeated them. De Fourcy saw von Bergow thrown with his horse, Meineger with a piece of a spear in his body, and the men asking in vain for mercy. He had escaped with great difficulty, wandering for several days in the forests, where he would have died of hunger or been destroyed by wild beasts if, by chance, he had not reached Ciechanow and found Brothers Gottfried and Rotgier.

From the expedition he had emerged with a feeling of humiliation and shame, and with a desire for vengeance and a longing for von Bergow, who was his dear friend. He had therefore joined with his whole soul in the complaint of the Knights of the Cross when they asked for the punishment of the Polish knight and the liberation of his unhappy companion. When their complaint had no effect whatever, he was ready at first to approve of any plan of vengeance against Jurand. But now some scruples were aroused in him. Listening to the conversation of the monks, and especially to what Hugo von Danveld had said, he could not refrain from astonishment. It is true, that having become well acquainted during the past few years with the Knights of the Cross, he knew that they were not what they were represented to be in Germany and in the west. In Marienburg, however, he knew a few honest and upright knights, who often complained of the corruption of the brothers, of their lasciviousness and lack of discipline. De Fourcy felt that they were right, but being himself dissolute and lacking in discipline, he did not criticise them for those faults, especially as all knights of the Order redeemed them with bravery. He had seen them at Wilno fighting hand to hand with the Polish knights, at the taking of castles, defended with superhuman stubbornness by Polish garrisons; he had seen them perish beneath the blows of axes and swords in general assaults or in single combats. They were merciless and cruel towards the Lithuanians, but they were nevertheless as brave as lions.

But now, it seemed to de Fourcy that Hugo von Danveld had counselled such an action as every knight's soul should abhor; and yet the other brothers not only were not angry with him, but approved of his words. His astonishment, therefore, increased; at length he became deeply thoughtful, pondering whether it was fitting that he should join in the performance of such deeds.

If it were only a question of carrying off the girl and then exchanging her for von Bergow, he might, perhaps, have consented to that, although his heart had been moved by Danusia's beauty. But evidently the Knights of the Cross desired something else. Through her, they wished to capture Jurand, and then murder him, and, with him, they must assuredly murder the girl also, in order to hide their fraud and crime.

They had threatened her already with the same fate that Witold's children met in case Jurand should dare to complain.

"They do not intend to keep any promise, but to cheat both and kill both," said de Fourcy to himself, "although they wear the Cross, and ought to guard their honour more rigorously than anyone else."

He grew more and more indignant at such effrontery, and, determining to verify his suspicions, he rode up to von Danveld and asked:

"If Jurand gives himself up to you, will you set the girl at liberty?"

"If we let her go free the whole world would immediately say that we had captured both of them," answered von Danveld.

"Then, what do you propose to do with her?"

At this, von Danveld bent towards the knight, laughed, and showed his rotten teeth from beneath his thick lips.

"Do you mean what will be done with her before or after?" he asked.

But de Fourcy, surmising already that which he wished to know, became silent. For a time he seemed to struggle with himself; then, raising himself in his stirrups, he said, so loudly that he could be heard by all four of the monks:

"The pious Brother Ulrich von Jungingen, who is an example and an ornament of knighthood, once said to me: 'Among the old knights in Marienburg one can still find worthy Knights of the Cross, but those who control the commandaries near the frontier only bring shame upon the Order.'"

"We are all sinful, but we serve the Saviour," answered Hugo.

"Where is your knightly honour? One cannot serve the Saviour by shameful deeds. You must know that I will not put my hand to anything like this, and that, moreover, I will prevent you."

"What will you prevent?"

"The artifice, the treachery, the shame!"

"How can you do so? In the fight with Jurand you lost your retinue and waggons. You are obliged to live on the generosity of the Order, and you will die of hunger if we do not throw you a piece of bread. And then, you are alone; we are four—how could you prevent us?"

"How can I prevent you?" repeated de Fourcy. "I can return to the mansion and warn the Prince; I can divulge your plans to the whole world."

Here the brothers of the Order looked at one another, and their faces changed in the twinkling of an eye. Hugo von Danveld especially looked questioningly into Siegfried von Löwe's eyes; then he turned to de Fourcy.

"Your ancestors," said he, "used to serve in the Order, and you also wished to join it; but we do not receive traitors."

"And I do not wish to serve with traitors."

"Ah! You shall not fulfil your threat. The Order knows how to punish not only the monks——"

De Fourcy, excited by these words, drew his sword; he seized the blade with his left hand, and, placing his right on the hilt, said:

"On this hilt, which is in the form of the Cross, by the head of St. Denis, my patron, and on my knightly honour, I swear that I will warn the Prince of Mazovia and the Grand Master!"

Hugo von Danveld again looked inquiringly at Siegfried von Löwe, who closed his eyelids, as if consenting to something.

Then von Danveld said in a strangely muffled and changed voice:

"St. Denis could carry his head after he was beheaded, but when yours once falls——"

"Do you threaten me?" interrupted de Fourcy.

"No, but I kill!" answered von Danveld. And he thrust his knife into de Fourcy's side with such force that the blade disappeared up to the hilt. De Fourcy screamed terribly; he tried to seize the sword which he held in his left hand with his right, but it fell from his grasp. At the same time the other three brothers pierced him mercilessly with their knives in the neck, in the back, and in the stomach, until he fell from his horse.

There was silence. De Fourcy, bleeding fearfully from

his wounds, writhed on the snow. From beneath the leaden sky there came only the cawing of the crows, flying towards human habitations from the silence of the wilderness.

There was a hurried conversation between the murderers.

"Our servants did not see anything?" said von Danveld, panting.

"No; they are in front. We cannot see them," answered von Loewe.

"Listen! We shall have cause for a new complaint. We will publish the report that the Mazovian knights fell upon us and killed our companion. We will shout aloud—they will hear us in Marienburg—that the Prince sent murderers even after his guests. Listen! We must say that Janusz would not listen to our complaints against Jurand, but ordered the accuser to be murdered."

Meanwhile, de Fourcy turned on his back in the convulsions of death and then remained motionless, with bloody froth on his lips and an expression of dread in his wide open eyes. Brother Rotgier looked at him, and said:

"See, pious brothers, how God punishes even the thought of treachery!"

"What we have done was done for the good of the Order," answered Gottfried. "Glory to those——"

But he stopped; for at that moment, behind them, at the bend of the snowy road, there appeared a horseman, who came rushing on as fast as his horse could go. Seeing him, Hugo von Danveld quickly exclaimed:

"Whoever this man is, he must die!" And von Loewe, who, although the oldest among the brothers, had very keen eyesight, said:

"I recognise him; it is the shield-bearer who killed the bison with an axe. Yes, it is he!"

"Hide your knives, so that he may not be frightened," said von Danveld. "I will attack him first; you shall follow me."

Meanwhile the Czech approached, and reined in his horse at a distance of eight or ten paces. He saw the corpse lying in the pool of blood, and the riderless horse, and astonishment appeared on his face; but it lasted only for the twinkling of an eye. He turned to the brothers as if nothing had happened, and said:

"I bow before you, brave knights!"

"We recognise you," answered von Danveld, approaching slowly. "Have you anything for us?"

"The Knight of Bogdaniec, whose spear-bearer I am, sent me, for, being injured by the bison, he could not come himself."

"What does your master wish from us?"

"My master commands me to tell you that because you unrighteously accused Jurand of Spychow to the detriment of his knightly honour, you have not acted as honest knights, but have howled like dogs; and if any one of you feels insulted by these words, he challenges him to a combat, on horseback or on foot, to the last breath. He will be ready for the fight as soon as with God's help and mercy he is released from his present indisposition."

"Tell your master that the Knights of the Order bear insults patiently for the Saviour's sake, and that they cannot fight without special permission from the Grand Master or the Grand Marshal, for which permission they will write to Marienburg."

The Czech again looked at de Fourcy's corpse, for he had been sent especially to that knight. Zbyszko knew that the monks could not fight in single combat, but, hearing that there was a lay knight with them, he desired to challenge him, thinking that by doing so he would win Jurand's favour. But that knight lay slaughtered like an ox by the four Knights of the Cross.

It is true that the Czech did not understand what had happened; but, being accustomed from childhood to all kinds of danger, he suspected treachery. He was surprised, moreover, to see that von Danveld, while talking with him, approached closer and closer, while the others began to ride to his side, as if to surround him. He was, therefore, upon the alert, particularly as he had no weapons, for, being in great haste, he had not brought any.

Meanwhile von Danveld, who was near him, said:

"I promised your master some healing balm; he repays me scurvily for my good deed. But no wonder; that is the usual thing among the Poles. But as he is severely injured and may soon be called to God, tell him——"

Here he placed his left hand on the Czech's shoulder.

"Tell him that I—I answer thus!——"

As he spoke, his knife gleamed near the shield-bearer's

throat; but before he could thrust, the Czech, who had been watching his movements closely, seizing von Danveld's right hand in his iron grasp, bent and twisted it so that the bones cracked. Then hearing him roar terribly with the pain, he pricked his horse, and sped away like an arrow before the others could stop him.

Brothers Rotgier and Gottfried pursued him, but they soon returned, frightened by a dreadful cry from von Danveld. Von Löwe supported him with his shoulders, while he moaned so loudly that the retinue, although riding with the waggons a great distance in front, stopped their horses.

"What is the matter with you?" asked the brothers.

But von Löwe ordered them to ride forward as fast as they could and bring a waggon, as von Danveld could not remain in his saddle. After a moment, a cold perspiration covered his forehead, and he fainted.

When they brought the waggon they laid him on some straw in the bottom, and hurried towards the frontier. Von Löwe urged them forward, for he realised that after what had happened they should lose no time in attending to von Danveld. Seating himself beside him in the waggon, he rubbed his face with snow from time to time; but he could not revive him. At last, when near the frontier, von Danveld opened his eyes, and began to look round.

"How do you feel?" asked von Löwe.

"I feel no pain, but neither can I feel my hand," answered von Danveld.

"Because it has grown stiff already; that is why you do not feel any pain. It will come back in a warm room. Meanwhile, thank God for even a moment of relief."

Rotgier and Gottfried approached the waggon.

"What a misfortune!" said the first. "What shall we do now?"

"We will declare," said von Danveld in a feeble voice, "that the shield-bearer murdered de Fourcy."

"It is their latest crime, and the culprit is known!" added Rotgier.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE Czech rushed as fast as he could to the Prince's hunting residence, and, finding him still there, he told him first what had happened. Happily, there were some courtiers who had seen the shield-bearer go without any arms. One of them had even shouted after him, half in jest, to take some old iron, as otherwise the Germans would get the best of him; but he, fearing that the knights would pass the frontier, had leaped on horseback as he stood, in a sheepskin overcoat, and hastened after them. These testimonies dispelled all possible doubts from the Prince's mind as to who had murdered de Fourcy; but they also filled him with uneasiness and with anger, so that at first he wished to pursue the Knights of the Cross, capture them, and send them to the Grand Master in chains. After a while, however, he came to the conclusion that it was impossible to reach them on this side of the border.

"I will send instead," he said, "a letter to the Grand Master, so that he may know what they are doing here. God will punish them for this."

He became thoughtful for a time; then he said to the courtiers:

"I cannot understand why they killed their guest. I should suspect the shield-bearer if I did not know that he went there without weapons."

"Pshaw!" said Father Wyszoniak, "why should the boy kill him? He had not seen him before. Then, suppose he had arms, how could he attack five of them and their armed retainers?"

"That is true," said the Prince. "Their guest must have opposed them in something, or perhaps he did not care to lie as they wished him. I saw them wink at him to induce him to say that Jurand was the first to begin the fight."

"He is a strong fellow," said Mrokota of Mocarzew, "if he could crush the arm of that dog von Danveld."

"He said he heard the bones of the German crack," answered the Prince; "and remembering what he did in the forest, one must admit it to be true! Both master and servant are strong fellows. But for Zbyszko, the bison would have rushed upon the horses. Both the Lorrainer and he greatly contributed to the rescue of the Princess."

"To be sure, they are fine lads," declared Father Wyzoniek. "Even now that he can hardly breathe, he has taken Jurand's part, and challenged those knights. Jurand needs exactly such a son-in-law."

"In Krakow, Jurand said differently; but now, I think he will not oppose him," said the Prince.

"The Lord Jesus will help," said the Princess, who entered just then, and heard the end of the conversation. "Jurand cannot oppose it now, if only God will restore Zbyszko's health; but we must reward him also."

"The best reward for him will be Danusia, and I think he will get her, for when the women resolve to accomplish some object, then even Jurand himself cannot prevent them."

"Nothing will please Zbyszko more than to receive a knight's belt and golden spurs."

The Prince smiled benevolently, and answered:

"Well, let the girl carry them to him; and when the illness leaves him, then we will see that everything is accomplished according to custom. Let her carry them to him immediately, for sudden joy is the best!"

On hearing this, the Princess embraced her lord in the presence of the courtiers, and kissed his hands, whereat he smiled and said:

"You see—a good idea!—the Holy Ghost has granted women some sense also! Now, call the girl."

"Danusia! Danusia!" called the Princess.

Danusia instantly appeared at the side door. Her eyes were red with sleepless nights, and she held a pot of steaming gruel, which Father Wyzoniek had ordered to be applied to Zbyszko's fractured bones.

"Come to me, my dear child!" said the Prince Janusz. "Put aside the pot, and come."

She approached with some timidity, for "the lord" always excited some fear in her; but he embraced her kindly, and began to caress her face, saying:

"Well, the poor child is unhappy—eh?"

"Yes!" answered Danusia.

And, being sad at heart, she began to weep, but very quietly, in order not to disturb the Prince.

"Why do you weep?" he asked.

"Because Zbyszko is ill," she answered, putting her hands to her eyes.

"Do not be afraid, he is in no danger. Is it not so, Father Wyszaniek?"

"Ha-ha! By God's will, he is nearer to the wedding than to the coffin!" answered the good-hearted father.

"Wait!" said the Prince. "Meanwhile, I will give you some medicine for him, and I trust it will relieve him or cure him entirely."

"Have the Knights of the Cross sent the balm?" asked Danusia quickly, taking her hands from her eyes.

"With the balm which the knights send, you had better smear a dog than a knight whom you love. I will give you something else."

Then he turned to the courtiers and said:

"Make haste and bring the spurs and the belt."

When they had brought them, he said to Danusia:

"Take these to Zbyszko, and tell him that from this time he is a belted knight. If he die, then he will appear before God as 'miles cinctus'; if he live, then the rest will be accomplished in Ciechanow or in Warsaw."

Hearing these words, Danusia clasped "the lord" by his knees; she then caught the knightly insignia with one hand and the pot of porridge with the other, and rushed to the room where Zbyszko was lying. The Princess, not wishing to lose sight of their joy, followed her.

Zbyszko was very ill; but, seeing Danusia, he turned his pale face towards her and asked:

"Has the Czech returned?"

"No matter about the Czech!" answered the girl. "I bring you better news than that. The Prince has made you a knight, and has sent you these by me."

As she said this, she put down the girdle and the spurs beside him. Zbyszko's pale cheeks flushed with joy and astonishment; he glanced at Danusia and then at the spurs.

"How could he dub me a knight?" he asked, closing his eyes.

At that moment the Princess entered, and he raised himself a little and began to thank her, for he guessed that it was her intervention that had brought such great favour and bliss to him. But she ordered him to be quiet, and helped Danusia to lay his head on the pillows again. Meanwhile the Prince, Father Wyszoniak, Mrokota, and several other courtiers entered.

Prince Janusz waved his hand to signify that Zbyszko must not move; then, seating himself beside the bed, he said:

"As you know, the people must not wonder that there is reward for good deeds, for if virtue remained without any recompense, human iniquities would walk without punishment. You did not spare your life, but with peril to yourself defended us from fearful mourning. We therefore permit you to don the knightly girdle, and from this moment to walk in glory and fame."

"Gracious lord," answered Zbyszko, "I would not spare even ten lives——"

But he could not say anything more because of his emotion; and the Princess put her hand on his lips, as the Father Wyszoniak did not permit him to talk.

"I think," the Prince went on, "that you know the knightly duties, and that you will wear the insignia with honour. You must serve our Saviour, and fight against the starosta of hell. You must be faithful to the anointed Lord, avoid unrighteous wars, and defend innocence against oppression. May God and the Holy Passion help you!"

"Amen!" answered Father Wyszoniak.

The Prince rose up, made the sign of the cross over Zbyszko, and added:

"And when you recover go immediately to Ciechanow, whither I will summon Jurand."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THREE days afterwards a woman arrived with the balm, and with her came the captain of the archers from Szczytno, with a letter signed by the brothers and sealed with von Danveld's seal. In the letter the Knights of the Cross called upon heaven and earth as witnesses of the wrongs committed against them in Mazovia, and, with a threat of God's vengeance, they asked for punishment for the murder of their beloved comrade and guest. Von Danveld added to the letter his personal complaint, asking humbly, but also threateningly, recompense for his crippled hand and a sentence of death against the Czech.

"The Grand Master sent those scoundrels of Krzyzaks to win me over, but they have incited me to wrath," exclaimed the Prince. "Tell them from me that they killed their guest themselves, and intended to murder the Czech. I will write to the Grand Master about it, and I will request him to send other envoys if he wishes me to be neutral in case of war between the Order and the King of Krakow."

"Gracious lord," answered the captain, "must I carry such an answer to the mighty and pious brothers?"

"If that is not enough, then tell them that I look upon them as dog-brothers and not honest knights!"

This was the end of the audience. The captain went away, for the Prince departed the same day for Ciechanow. Only the sister remained with the balm, but the mistrustful Father Wyszoniak would not use it, especially as the sick man had slept well during the preceding night, and had awakened without any fever, although he was still very weak. Immediately after the Prince's departure the sister apparently sent a servant for a new medicine—the "egg of a basilisk"—which, she affirmed, had the power to restore strength even to people in agony. As for herself, she wandered about the mansion. She was

very humble, and was dressed in a lay dress, but similar to that worn by members of the Order; she carried a rosary and a small pilgrim's gourd at her belt. She was without power in one of her hands. As she spoke Polish well, she asked the servants about Zbyszko and Danusia, to whom she made a present of a rose of Jericho. On the second day during Zbyszko's slumber, while Danusia was sitting in the dining-hall, she approached her and said:

"May God bless you, Panienka! Last night, after my prayers, I dreamed that there were two knights walking during the fall of the snow. One of them came first and wrapped you in a white mantle, and the other said: 'I see only the snow, and she is not here.' Then he returned."

Danusia, who was sleepy, immediately opened her blue eyes curiously, and asked:

"What does it mean?"

"It means that the one who loves you best will get you."

"That is Zbyszko!" said the girl.

"I do not know, for I did not see his face; I only saw the white mantle, and then I awoke. The Lord Jesus sends me pain every night in my feet, and I cannot move my hand."

"How strange that the balm has not helped you!"

"It cannot help me, Panienka, because the pain is a punishment for a sin. If you wish to know what the sin was I will tell you."

Danusia nodded her head as a sign that she wished to know, and the sister continued:

"There are also servants—women—in the Order, who, although they do not make any vows, and are allowed to marry, are obliged to perform certain duties for the Order, according to the brothers' demands. The one who meets such favour and honour receives a pious kiss from a brother knight as a sign that from that moment she is to serve the Order with words and deeds. Ah, Panienka! I was about to receive that great favour, but, in sinful obduracy, instead of receiving it with gratitude, I committed a great sin, and was punished for it."

"What did you do?"

"Brother von Danveld came to me and gave me the kiss of the Order; but, thinking that he did so from mere licence, I raised my wicked hand against him —"

Here she began to strike her breast, and repeated several times :

"God be merciful to me a sinner!"

"What happened then?" asked Danusia.

"Immediately my hand became motionless, and from that moment I have been crippled. I was young and foolish—I did not know! But I was punished. If a woman fears that a brother of the Order wishes to do something wicked, she must leave the judgment to God, and must not resist herself, for whosoever contradicts the Order or a brother of the Order will feel God's anger!"

Then there was silence. Suddenly the sister, as if she had just remembered something, said:

"I dreamed that some knight wrapped you with a white mantle on the snow. Perhaps it was a Knight of the Cross! They wear white mantles."

"I want neither Knights of the Cross nor their mantles," answered the girl.

But further conversation was interrupted by Father Wyszoniak, who, on entering the room, nodded to Danusia and said:

"Praise God, and come to Zbyszko! He has awakened, and has asked for something to eat. He is much better."

Zbyszko, indeed, was now a great deal better, and Father Wyszoniak was almost sure that he would recover, when an unexpected accident upset all his expectations. There came envoys from Jurand with a letter to the Princess, containing dreadful news. In Spychow, half of Jurand's castle had been burned, and he himself, during the rescue, had been struck by a beam. True, Father Kaleb, who wrote the letter, said that Jurand would recover, but that the sparks had burned his remaining eye so badly that there was very little sight left in it, and he was likely to become blind.

For this reason Jurand asked his daughter to come to Spychow as soon as possible as he wished to see her once more before he should be entirely encompassed by darkness. He also desired her to remain with him; even the blind, who beg by the wayside, he said, had some one to lead them by the hand and show them the way; why should he be deprived of that service and die among strangers? The letter also contained humble thanks to the Princess, who had taken care of the girl like a mother; and finally Jurand promised that, although blind,

he would go to Warsaw once more, in order to kneel at the lady's feet and beg her further favour for Danusia.

When Father Wyszoniak had finished reading the letter, the Princess could not say a word for some time. She had hoped that, when Jurand came to see his daughter and herself, she would be able, by the Prince's and her own influence, to obtain the father's consent to the wedding of the young couple. She now feared, however, that Jurand would marry the girl to some neighbour of his, so as to spend the rest of his life among his own people. It was no use to think about Zbyszko; he could not go to Spychow, and then, who knew how he would be received there? The lady knew that Jurand had refused to give him Danusia, for he had told the Princess herself that some secret reason prevented him from consenting. In great grief, therefore, she ordered the chief envoy to be brought to her, as she desired to ask him about the Spychow misfortune, and also to learn something about Jurand's plans.

She was very much surprised when a stranger came, instead of old Tolima, who used to bear the shield behind Jurand and usually carried his messages. The stranger, however, told her that Tolima had been seriously injured in the last fight with the Germans, and was dying in Spychow. Jurand, being very ill himself, had asked her to send his daughter without delay, as every day he saw less and less, and perhaps in a few days he would become blind. The messenger begged the Princess to permit him to take the girl as soon as the horses had rested, but as it was already dusk she refused, especially as she did not wish to distress Zbyszko and Danusia by such a sudden separation.

Zbyszko already knew all about it, and he lay like one stricken by a heavy blow, when the Princess entered, and, wringing her hands, exclaimed at the threshold:

"We cannot help it; he is her father!"

"We cannot help it!" he repeated after her like an echo. "Gracious lady, I fear that I shall never see Danusia again."

And the lady, being sorrowful herself, answered:

"I should not be surprised if you died of grief; but the Lord Jesus is merciful."

"But if Jurand die first," she added, after a while, wishing to comfort him, "then the tutelage will be the

Prince's and mine, and we will give her to you immediately."

"He will not die!" answered Zbyszko.

But some new thought suddenly came to his mind, for he sat up in the bed and said in a changed voice:

"Gracious lady——"

At that moment Danusia interrupted him; she came crying, and said from the threshold:

"Zbyszko! Do you know about it already? I pity my father, but I pity you also, poor boy!"

When she approached, Zbyszko encircled her with his sound arm, and began to speak.

"How can I live without you, my love? Have I travelled through rivers and forests, have I made the vow to serve you, only to lose you? Ah! Sorrow will not help, weeping will not help, or even death itself, for even if the grass grow over me, my soul will not forget you, even if I am in the presence of the Lord Jesus or of God the Father. There must be a remedy, I say. I feel a terrible pain in my bones, but you must fall at our lady's feet—for I cannot—and ask her to have mercy upon us."

Danusia, hearing this, ran quickly to the Princess's feet, and seizing them in her arms, she hid her face in the folds of her heavy dress. The lady turned her compassionate eyes to Zbyszko, and said in surprise:

"How can I show you mercy? If I do not let the child go to her sick father I shall draw God's anger upon myself."

Zbyszko, who had been sitting on the bed, slipped down on the pillows, and could not say a word for a time, as he was exhausted. Slowly, however, he began to move one hand towards the other on his breast until he joined them as if in prayer.

"Rest," said the Princess; "then you may tell me what you wish; and you, Danusia, rise and release my knees."

"Release them, but do not rise," said Zbyszko; "beg with me."

Then he began to speak in a feeble and broken voice:

"Gracious lady, Jurand was against me in Krakow, he will be against me here also; but if Father Wyszoniak married me to Danusia, then afterwards she might go to Spychow, for there is no human power that could take her away from me——"

These words were so unexpected by the Princess that she rose hastily from the bench; she then sat down again, and as if she had not thoroughly understood what he had said:

"For heaven's sake! Father Wyszoniek!" she exclaimed.

"Gracious lady! Gracious lady!" begged Zbyszko.

"Gracious lady!" repeated Danusia, embracing the Princess's knees.

"How could it be done without her father's permission?"

"God's law is the stronger!" answered Zbyszko.

"For heaven's sake!"

"Who is the father if not the Prince? Who is the mother if not you, gracious lady?"

And Danusia added:

"Dearest Matuchna!"*

"It is true that I have been and am still a mother to her," said the Princess, "and Jurand received his wife from my hand. It is true! And if you are once married, everything is ended. Perhaps Jurand will be angry, but he must be obedient to the commands of the Prince his lord. Then no one need tell him immediately, unless he wished to give her to another, or make her a nun; and if he has made some vow, it will not be his fault that he cannot fulfil it. No one can act against God's will—perhaps it is God's will!"

"It cannot be otherwise!" exclaimed Zbyszko.

But the Princess, still very much excited, said:

"Wait; I must collect my thoughts. If the Prince were here, I should go to him immediately and say to him: 'May I give Danusia to Zbyszko or not?' But I am afraid without him, and there is not much time to spare, for she must go to-morrow! O, sweet Jesus, let her get married, then there will be peace! But I cannot recover my senses again, and I am afraid of something. And you, Danusia, are you not afraid? Speak!"

"I shall die otherwise!" interrupted Zbyszko.

Danusia arose from the Princess's knees; she was not merely on confidential terms with the good lady, but also much spoiled by her. She therefore seized her round the neck, and began to hug her.

But the Princess said:

* A term of endearment for "mother."

"I will not promise you anything without Father Wyszoniak. Run for him immediately!"

Danusia went for Father Wyszoniak. Zbyszko turned his pale face towards the Princess, and said:

"What the Lord Jesus has destined for me must be; but for this consolation may God reward you, gracious lady."

"Do not bless me yet," answered the Princess; "we do not know what will happen. You must swear to me upon your honour that if you are married, you will not prevent the girl from going to her father, or else you will draw his curse upon yourself and her."

"Upon my honour!" said Zbyszko.

"Remember then! And she must not tell Jurand immediately. We will send for him from Ciechanow, and make him come with Danusia, and then I will tell him myself, or I will ask the Prince to do so. When he sees that there is no remedy, he will consent. He did not dislike you?"

"No," said Zbyszko, "he did not dislike me. Perhaps he will be pleased when Danusia is mine. If he made a vow, it will not be his fault that he could not keep it."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Danusia and Father Wyszoniak. The Princess at once asked his advice, and began to tell him, with great enthusiasm, about Zbyszko's plan. But, as soon as he heard about it, he made the sign of the cross with astonishment, and said:

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost! How can I do it? It is Advent!"

"For God's sake! That is true!" exclaimed the Princess.

Then there was silence; only their sorrowful faces showed what a blow those words of Father Wyszoniak were to all of them.

"If only you had a dispensation," he said after a while, "then I would not oppose it, for I pity you. I would not ask for Jurand's permission, because our gracious lady consents, and vouches for the Prince's consent. Well, they are mother and father for all Mazovia! But without a bishop's dispensation, I cannot. If the Bishop of Kurdwanow were with us he would not refuse a dispensation, although he is a severe priest, and not like his predecessor, Bishop Mamphiolus, who used to answer, 'Bene! Bene!' to everything."

"Bishop James of Kurdwanow loves the Prince and myself very much," said the lady.

"Therefore I say he would not refuse a dispensation, the more so as there are certain reasons for one. The girl must go to her father, and the young man is ill and may die—hm!—in articulo mortis. But without a dispensation I cannot."

"I could obtain it afterwards from Bishop James; no matter how severe he may be, he will not refuse me this favour. I guarantee that he will not refuse," said the Princess.

To this Father Wyszoniak, who was a kind and easy man, replied:

"A word of the Lord's anointed is a great word. I am afraid of the bishop—but, that great word! Then the youth could promise some gift to the cathedral in Plock. Well, as long as the dispensation does not come, there will be a sin—and nobody's but mine. Hm! It is true that the Lord Jesus is merciful, and if anyone sin not for his own benefit, but out of mercy for human misery, He forgives more easily! But there will be a sin; and, suppose the bishop should refuse, who will grant me pardon?"

"The bishop will not refuse!" exclaimed Princess Anna.

Father Wyszoniak raised his eyes and his hands, and said:

"Let it be according to your wish!"

At these words joy filled their hearts. Zbyszko again sat up in the bed, and the Princess, Danusia, and Father Wyszoniak sat round it and began to plan how they should act.

They decided to keep the matter secret, so that not a soul in the house should know anything about it. They also decided that Jurand must not know until the Princess herself told him about everything when he came to Ciechanow.

Meanwhile, Father Wyszoniak was to write a letter from the Princess to Jurand and ask him to come to Ciechanow, where he would find better medicine and would not be weary. Finally, it was decided that Zbyszko and Danusia should go to confession, and that the wedding ceremony should be performed during the night when everyone should have retired.

The thought came to Zbyszko to have his shield-bearer,

the Czech, as a witness of the wedding, but he gave up the idea when he remembered that he had received him from Jagienka. For a moment she stood in his memory, as though present, so that it seemed to him that he saw her blushing face and her eyes full of tears, and heard her pleading voice say, "Do not do this! Do not repay me with evil for good, with misery for love!" All at once great compassion for her seized him, for he felt that a great wrong would be done her, after which she would find no consolation under the roof of Zgorzelice, or in the depths of the forest, or in the fields, or in the abbot's gifts, or in Cztan and Wilk's courtship. Therefore he said inwardly, "Girl, may God give you the best of everything, for although I would gladly give you the sky itself, I cannot."

But he was obliged to call the Czech to help him; therefore, although he determined not to say a word to him about what was going to happen, he summoned him, and said:

"To-day I am going to confession as well as to Communion, so you must dress me in my best clothing, as if I were going to the King's palace."

The Czech was a little afraid, and began to look into his face.

"Do not be alarmed," said Zbyszko, observing this; "people do not go to confession only when they expect to die; the holy days are coming, Father Wyszoniak and the Princess are going to Ciechanow, and then there will be no priest nearer than in Przasnysz."

"And are you not going?" asked the shield-bearer.

"If I recover my health, then I will go; but that is in God's hands."

The Czech was quieted, and, hurrying to the chests, brought the white jaka embroidered with gold, in which the knight used to dress for great occasions, and also a beautiful rug with which to cover the bed. Then, raising Zbyszko with the help of the two Turks, he washed him and combed his long hair, on which he put a scarlet zone. Finally he set him on red cushions, and, satisfied with his work, said:

"If Your Grace were but able to dance you might celebrate a wedding!"

"It will be necessary to celebrate it without dancing," answered Zbyszko, smiling.

In the meantime, the Princess was also thinking how to dress Danusia, for, to her womanly nature, this was a question of great importance, and under no consideration would she have consented to have her beloved foster-child married in her everyday dress. The servants, who were told that the girl had to dress in the colour of innocence for confession, very easily found a white dress, but there was much trouble about the wreath for the head. While thinking of it, the lady became so sad that she began to complain:

"My poor orphan, where shall I find a wreath of rue for you in this wilderness? There is none here, neither a flower nor a leaf; only some green moss under the snow."

And Danusia, standing with loosened hair, also became sorrowful, for she wanted a wreath. After a while, however, she pointed to the garland of immortelles, which hung on the wall of the room, and said:

"We must weave a wreath of those flowers, for we shall find nothing else, and Zbyszko will take me even with such a wreath."

The Princess would not consent at first, being afraid of a bad omen; but as there were no flowers near the mansion, which was used only for the hunting, the immortelles were ultimately taken. Meanwhile, Father Wyszoniak came and received Zbyszko's confession; he afterwards listened to the girl's confession, and then the gloomy night fell. The servants retired after supper, according to the Princess's order. Some of Jurand's men lay down in the servants' room, and others slept in the stables with the horses. Soon the fires in the servants' room became covered with ashes and were quenched, and at length everything was absolutely quiet in the forest house, although from time to time the dogs could be heard howling at the wolves in the direction of the forest.

But the windows in the rooms of the Princess, Father Wyszoniak, and Zbyszko were shining, throwing a red glow over the snow which covered the courtyard. They were waiting in silence, listening to the throbbing of their own hearts—uneasy, and affected by the solemnity of the approaching moment. After midnight the Princess took Danusia by the hand and conducted her to Zbyszko's room, where Father Wyszoniak was waiting for them. There was a great blaze in the fireplace, and by its

abundant but unsteady light Zbyszko perceived Danusia ; she looked a little pale from lack of sleep, and wore a long, stiff, white dress, with a wreath of immortelles on her brow. Her emotion was such that she closed her eyes ; her hands hung motionless against her dress, and she appeared like some painting on a church window. There was something spiritual about her which surprised Zbyszko, and made him think he was about to marry not an earthly, but a heavenly, being. He had still some such thought when she kneeled with crossed hands to receive the sacrament, and, bending her head, completely closed her eyes. In that moment she even seemed to him as if dead, and fear seized his heart. But it did not last long, for hearing the priest's voice repeat, "*Ecce Agnus Dei*," his thoughts went out towards God. In the room could be heard only the solemn voice of Father Wyszoniak, "*Domine, non sum dignus*," and with it the crackling of the logs in the fireplace and the sound of crickets chirping persistently and sadly in the chinks of the chimney. Out of doors, the wind rose and rustled through the snowy forest, but it soon ceased.

Zbyszko and Danusia remained for some time in silence. Father Wyszoniak took the chalice and carried it to the chapel of the mansion. After a while he returned, accompanied by de Lorche, and, seeing astonishment on the faces of those present, he placed his finger to his lips, as if to stop the cry of surprise.

"I understand," he said ; "but it will be better to have two witnesses to the marriage. I have told this knight, who has sworn to me on his honour, and on the relics of Aquisgranum, to keep the secret as long as is necessary."

De Lorche first kneeled before the Princess and then before Danusia ; then he rose and stood silently, clad in his armour, on which the red light of the fire was playing. He stood motionless, as if plunged in an ecstasy, for to him also the white girl with the wreath of immortelles on her brow seemed like the picture of an angel seen on the window of some Gothic cathedral.

The priest placed her near Zbyszko's bed, and, putting the stole round her hands, began the customary rite. On the Princess's kindly face the tears dropped down one after another, but within she was not uneasy, for she believed she was doing well in uniting these two fair and innocent children. De Lorche kneeled again, and, leaning

with both hands on the hilt of his sword, looked like a knight beholding a vision. The young people repeated the priest's words: "I . . . take you . . . " and those sweet, solemn words were again accompanied by the chirping of the crickets in the chimney and the crackling in the fireplace. When the ceremony was finished, Danusia fell at the feet of the Princess, who blessed the couple and then entrusted them to the care of the divine might.

"Now be merry!" she said to Zbyszko, "for she is yours and you are hers."

Zbyszko extended his sound arm to Danusia, and she put her arms round his neck. For some time one could hear them repeating to each other:

"Danusia, you are mine!"

"Zbyszko, you are mine!"

But soon Zbyszko became weak, for his emotion had been too great for his strength, and, falling back upon the pillow, he began to breathe heavily. But he did not faint, nor did he cease to smile at Danusia, who wiped his face, which was covered with a cold perspiration.

"Danusia, you are mine!" he kept repeating; and every time he said it she nodded her fair head in assent.

The sight deeply moved de Lorche, who declared that in no other country had he seen such loving and tender hearts. He therefore solemnly swore that he was ready to fight on foot or on horseback with any knight, magician, or dragon who would dare to prevent their happiness, and the Princess and Father Wyszoniak were witnesses of his oath.

But the lady, unable to conceive of a marriage without some merriment, brought some wine, which they drank. The hours of night flew past. Zbyszko, overcoming his weakness, drew Danusia to him, and said:

"Since the Lord Jesus has given you to me, nobody can take you from me; but I am sorry that you must leave me, my sweetest berry."

"I will come with my father to Ciechanow," answered Danusia.

"If only you do not become sick! God preserve you from any mishap! You must go to Spychow, I know! Ah! I must be thankful to God and to our gracious lady that you are already mine, for we are now married, and no human force can break our marriage."

But as this marriage was performed secretly during the night, and separation was necessary immediately afterwards, not only Zbyszko, but everyone was filled with sadness from time to time. The conversation was broken. At intervals, too, the fire was quenched, and all was plunged in obscurity. Father Wyszoniak threw fresh logs on the charcoal, and when the wood whined, as often happens when it is fresh, he said:

"Penitent soul, what do you wish?"

The crickets answered him, and the growing flames, which brought the sleepless faces out from the shadow, were reflected in de Lorche's armour, lighting Danusia's white dress and the immortelles on her head.

The dogs outside again began to howl in the direction of the forest, as they do when they scent wolves.

As the hours of the night flew on, the intervals of silence became more frequent.

"Sweet Jesus," said the Princess at length. "We had better go to bed if we are going to sit like this after a wedding, but as we have determined to watch until morning, then play for us, my little flower, for the last time before your departure, on the little lute—for me and for Zbyszko."

"What shall I play?" she asked.

"What?" said the Princess. "What else if not the same song you sang in Tyniec, when Zbyszko saw you for the first time."

"Oh! I remember; I shall never forget it," said Zbyszko. "When I heard that song somewhere else, I wept."

"Then I will sing it!" said Danusia.

And immediately she began to thrum on the lute; then, raising her little head, she sang:

My heart is heavy for lack of thee,
Of thee, my love! O my love!
To thee I'd fly over land and sea,
Were I but a bird, my love!
I'd sit and sing in a leafy tree,
Near thee, my love! O my love!
I'd sing and ask thee to look on me,
On me, O my love! My love!

But all at once her voice broke, her lips began to tremble, and from beneath her closed eyelids the tears began to flow down her cheeks. For a moment she tried

not to let them escape, but she could not keep them back, and at last she began to weep, exactly as she had done the last time she sang the song to Zbyszko in the prison in Krakow.

"Danusia! What is the matter, Danusia?" asked Zbyszko.

"Why are you weeping?" exclaimed the Princess. "Such a wedding! Why?"

"I do not know," answered Danusia, sobbing. "I am so sad! I regret leaving Zbyszko and you so much."

They all became very sorrowful and began to console her, explaining to her that she was not going to remain in Spychow a long time, but that they would surely be with Jurand in Ciechanow for the holy days. Zbyszko again encircled her with his arm, drew her to his breast, and kissed the tears from her eyes, but the oppression remained in all hearts; and thus the hours of night passed.

At length, from the courtyard there sounded such a sudden and dreadful noise, that all shivered. The Princess, rushing from the bench, exclaimed:

"For God's sake! They are watering the horses!"

And Father Wyzoniek looked through the window, in which the glass balls were growing grey, and said:

"The night grows pale, and the day is coming. 'Ave Maria, gratia plena'——"

He then left the room but returned in a little while.

"The day breaks," he said, "but it will be dark. Jurand's people are watering their horses. Poor child, you must get ready!"

The Princess and Danusia began to weep very loudly, and both, together with Zbyszko, began to lament, as simple people do when they have to separate. It was half a lament and half a song, which flowed from their full souls as naturally as tears flow from the eyes.

Farewell! A grief steals o'er my heart,
For 'tis the hour when we must part.

Farewell! Farewell!

Zbyszko drew Danusia to his breast for the last time, and kept her for a long time, as long as he could breathe, and until the Princess drew her from him, in order to dress her for the journey.

Meanwhile it had become broad daylight.

In the mansion every one was up and moving about.

The Czech came to Zbyszko to ask about his health and to learn what his orders were.

"Draw the bed to the window," said the knight to him.

The Czech drew the bed to the window very easily, but was surprised when Zbyszko told him to open it. He obeyed, but covered his master with his own fur coat, for, although cloudy, it was cold outside, and snow was falling.

Zbyszko began to look. In the courtyard, through the flakes of the falling snow, he could see lights, while round them on steaming horses, Jurand's people were standing. All were armed. The forest was entirely covered with the snow; one could hardly see the enclosures and the gate.

Danusia, all wrapped up in furs, rushed once more into Zbyszko's room; once more she put her arms round his neck and bade him farewell.

"Although I am going away, I am always yours," she cried.

He kissed her hands, her cheeks, and her eyes, and said:

"May God protect you! May God lead you! You are mine—mine until death!"

When they had separated, he raised himself as much as he could, leaned his head on the window, and looked out. Thus, through the snowflakes, as through a veil, he saw Danusia sitting in the sledge. The Princess held her a long time in her arms, the ladies of the Court kissed her, and Father Wyszoniak made the sign of the cross for the journey. Before the departure, she turned once more towards him, stretching out her arms, and exclaiming:

"Zbyszko, remain with God!"

"May God permit me to see you in Ciechanow!" he answered.

But the snow was falling heavily, as though to deaden every sound and cover everything. Those parting words came muffled to the lovers' ears, so that it seemed to them as if they were already calling to each other from afar.

PART IV.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER the abundant snowfalls came severe cold, but the weather was dry and beautiful. During the day, the snow-clad forests glittered in the sun's rays, while the ice bound up the rivers and the marshes in its solid, glistening covering. Then the bright nights came, during which the cold increased so much that the trees in the woods cracked with a great noise. The birds drew near the houses; the roads became dangerous because of the wolves, which now began to gather into packs, and attack not only solitary people, but the villages as well. The people, however, made merry in their smoky houses by the fireside, predicting a good crop after such a severe winter, and joyfully awaiting the approach of Christmas.

The Prince's hunting lodge became less animated. The Princess went with Father Wyszoniak to Ciechanow. Zbyszko, who was now considerably better, remained in the house, together with his retinue, Sanderus, the Czech, his shield-bearer, and his servants from Bogdaniec, over whom there was an old housekeeper.

But the knight's soul longed for his young wife. It is true that it was a great consolation to him to think that Danusia was his, and that there was now no human power which could take her from him; but, on the other hand, the same thought increased his yearning. All day long he sighed for the moment when he would be able to leave the lodge, and he was constantly thinking what he should then do, where he should go, and how he might obtain Jurand's consent. Sometimes he was very uneasy; but, on the whole, the future appeared bright to him. Very often he had a desire to speak about it with the Czech, of whom he was very fond, but he observed that

Hlawa, being devoted with his whole soul to Jagienka, did not like to talk about Danusia; and as for himself, being bound by the secret, he could not tell him all that had happened.

Two days before Christmas Eve he ordered the sledges to be got ready and the horses to be saddled, and told the Czech that he intended to set out for Ciechanow. The faithful shield-bearer became sorrowful, for it was very cold.

"Do not trouble your head about that," said Zbyszko to him. "We have nothing to do here, and even if I should become worse, I shall have plenty of care at Ciechanow. And then, I shall not go on horseback, but in a sledge; I shall cover myself with skins, and only when near Ciechanow shall I mount a horse."

It was done as he said. The Czech understood his master well, and knew that it was a bad business to contradict him, and a still worse not to obey him immediately. An hour later, therefore, they set out. As they were ready to start, Zbyszko saw Sanderus spring into the sledge with his box.

"Why do you stick to me like a burdock to a sheep's back?" he asked. "Did you not tell me that you were going to Prussia?"

"Yes, sir, I said I purposed going to Prussia," said Sanderus; "but how can I go there alone, and in such cold? The wolves would eat me up before the first star had risen. And I cannot remain here either; I prefer the city. I will edify the people by my piety; I will sell them my holy wares and rescue them from the temptations of the devil, as I promised in Rome to the Father of Christendom. Besides, I dearly love your Grace, so, as I may be useful to you, I will not leave you until I return to Rome."

"He is always glad to eat and drink to your health," said the Czech; "that service he is always ready to render. But, should we be attacked in the neighbourhood of Przasnysz by too many wolves, we will throw him to them to satisfy their hunger, for he is good for nothing else."

"You had best have a care that your sinful words do not freeze to your moustache," answered Sanderus, "for such icicles thaw only in the fire of hell."

In this fashion they quarrelled, although they were fond

of each other. Zbyszko, however, did not forbid Sanderus to go with him, for his wit amused him, and it seemed that he really loved him. They left the hunting lodge in the morning, although it was so cold that they were obliged to cover the horses. The whole country was covered with snow, and one could hardly see the roofs of the houses emerging from beneath it.

Zbyszko travelled in one of the sledges. He ordered the Czech to sit beside him and have ready a crossbow for the wolves.

"In Przasnysz," said he as they drove along, "we shall only bait the horses and warm ourselves, and proceed again as soon as possible."

"To Ciechanow?"

"To Ciechanow first, to bow before the lord and perform our devotions."

"And then?" asked the Czech.

"Then, who knows!" answered Zbyszko with a smile; "perhaps to Bogdaniec."

The Czech looked at him in astonishment. He thought that perhaps his young master had given up Jurandowna, as she had gone away, and he had heard that the Lord of Spychow was against the young knight.

"Then your Grace will settle down on your patrimony?" said he joyfully.

"How can I settle down," answered Zbyszko, "when I have challenged those three German knights, and before them Lichtenstein? De Lorche has said that the Grand Master is about to invite the King to Orun, so I shall follow the King's retinue; and I think that, in Torun, Pan Zawisza of Grabow, or Pan Powala of Taczew, will obtain me permission to fight with these monks. I am sure they will come out to the combat with their shield-bearers, so you will be obliged to fight also."

"I would become a monk myself were it otherwise," answered the Czech.

Zbyszko looked on him with satisfaction.

"The man who comes under your iron will not be very comfortable," said he. "The Lord Jesus has given you extraordinary strength."

The Czech began to move his head, as if to show that he did not mean to spare his strength against the Germans. Zbyszko smiled, not at the shield-bearer, but at his own thoughts.

"The old man will be pleased when we return," said he to the Czech after a pause, "in Zgorzelice also they will be pleased." Then he remembered Jagienka.

"No!" said he to himself, "she will not be pleased, for if I return to Bogdaniec it will be with Danusia, and she must take some one else."

Here Wilk of Brzozowa and the young Cztan of Rogow passed before his eyes, and he suddenly became uneasy in case the girl might become the wife of one of them.

"I should prefer that she found some one better," he said to himself, "for they are drunkards and gamblers, and the girl is good."

He then reflected that, when his uncle learned what had happened, he would not be pleased. He was, however, comforted by the thought that Macko, above all else, cared for riches, in order that the importance of the family might be increased. It is true that Jagienka was nearer, but Jurand was a greater lord than Zych of Zgorzelice. He might easily hope, therefore, that Macko would not be against his marriage for any length of time. He would grumble for a time; then he would be pleased, and love Danusia as his own child. Presently his heart was moved with tenderness and longing for his uncle, who, although a hard man, cherished him as the apple of his eye.

"Ah! he will be pleased, he will be pleased!" repeated Zbyszko to himself. "I only wish Jurand would receive me as he will."

And he tried to imagine what Jurand would say and how he would act when he heard of the marriage. In his thoughts there was uneasiness, although by no means much, for everything was now over. Jurand could not challenge him, and in case he should show too great an opposition, he would answer him: "Your right to Danusia is human, while mine is divine; now she is not yours, but mine."

Some time before he had heard a seminarist, who knew the Scriptures well, say that a woman should leave her father and her mother, and follow her husband. He felt, therefore, that with him there was a mightier strength. He believed, moreover, that Danusia's prayers would help them greatly—as much, if not more, than the intercession of the Prince, Jurand being subject to him as well as to the Princess, whom he loved for taking care of his child.

In Przasnysz they were advised to remain for the night, as the wolves gathered in packs during the cold weather, and attacked travellers. But Zbyszko was not inclined to pay any heed to this warning, the more so as they had met at the inn some Mazovian knights, with their retinues, who were also going to the Prince at Ciechanow, along with a few armed merchants. There was no danger in travelling in such a large company, so they decided to continue their journey, notwithstanding that towards evening a strong wind began to blow, and was followed by a heavy fall of snow. They drove so slowly that Zbyszko began to think they would not arrive in time for supper. In some places they were obliged to open up the road by digging into the snow, as the horses could not pass. Happily, the forest road was straight. Dusk was gradually approaching when at length they caught sight of Ciechanow. They might have driven past the city amid the clouds of snow and the whistling wind, had it not been for some fires burning on a hill upon which a new castle was being built.

Meanwhile the snowstorm increased. A cold biting wind carried enormous clouds of snow before it. The trees shook, the wind roared and raged, driving the snow into huge drifts, raising them, twisting them about, and turning them into dust, covering the faces of horses and travellers anon as with a sharp sand, and stopping their breath and speech. The exhausted horses began to lean on each other, and to walk more and more slowly.

"Hah! what a storm, what a storm!" said the Czech, panting. "It is lucky for us that we are near the city, and that those fires are burning, otherwise we should have been in terrible straits."

"Anyone out on the plain must die!" answered Zbyszko; "but I do not see any fire now."

"Because the snow-clouds are so thick that even the fire cannot pierce them. Or perhaps the wind has blown away the coal and the wood."

"God grant that Jurand be not on the road!" said Zbyszko uneasily.

The Czech, although looking attentively in the direction of the fires, heard those words, and, turning his head, indifferently asked:

"Then the Pan of Spychow intended to come?"

"Yes."

"With the young lady?"

"There is no fire now," answered Zbyszko.

The flame, indeed, was quenched; but meanwhile there appeared on the road, close to the sledges, several men on horseback.

"Why do you bar the road?" shouted the watchful Czech, seizing his crossbow. "Who are you?"

"People from the Prince sent to help travellers."

"Let Jesus Christ be praised!"

"For ever and ever!"

"Conduct us to the city!" said Zbyszko.

"From whence are you coming?"

"From Przasnysz."

"Have you not seen any other travellers?"

"We have not; but they may be on other roads."

"People have been sent all round. Come with us. You have left the road. To the right!"

And they turned the horses. For some time nothing could be heard but the roaring of the wind.

"Are there many guests in the castle?" asked Zbyszko after an interval of silence.

"As usual, a good many," answered the nearest horseman.

"The Lord of Spychow—is he there?"

"No, he is not; but they are waiting for him. Some men have gone to meet him."

"With the fire-pots?"

"The wind would not permit it."

The roaring of the storm increased, and they could not speak further.

"The Devil's wedding!" said the Czech.

Zbyszko told him to be silent and not mention such an ugly name. Meanwhile they entered the city.

The snow-drifts lay so high in some places that they covered the windows, and thus, in driving round the city, it was impossible to see the lights. The wind, however, was not now so strong. The streets were empty, for the burghers were eating their suppers. The merchants, who accompanied Zbyszko and the other noblemen, remained in the city, so they drove without them towards the castle, which, having glass windows, shone before them plainly, although the wind blew the snow about in all directions.

The drawbridge was lowered, for the old days of

Lithuanian invasions were over, and the Knights of the Cross, designing a war with the King of Poland, were seeking the friendship of the Mazovian Prince. One of the Prince's men blew a horn, and the gate was immediately opened. Several archers stood near, but not a soul was on the walls. Old Mrokota came to meet the guests, and, after greeting them in the name of the Prince, conducted them to their rooms, so that they might dress for supper. Zbyszko at once asked him about Jurand of Spychow, and he answered that he had not come, but that they expected him, and that, had he been worse, he would have informed them. Some men had been sent to meet him, as even the oldest people could not remember such a terrible snowstorm.

"Perhaps they will soon be here."

"Probably. The Princess ordered us to put the plates for them on the common table."

Zbyszko, although a little afraid of Jurand, was glad.

"No matter what he does," he said to himself, "he cannot undo the fact that my wife is coming, my sweetest Danusia!"

And as he thus reasoned with himself, he could hardly believe his own happiness. He then thought that perhaps she had told her father everything, and might have obtained his consent.

"And after all," he reflected, "what can he do? Jurand is a wise man, and knows that, although he does not wish me to have her, I shall take her nevertheless, for my right is stronger."

While dressing he talked with Mrokota, asking him about the health of the Prince, and especially of the Princess, whom he loved as his own mother. He was glad to be told that all in the castle were well and happy, although the Princess longed very much for her darling singer. "Jagienka plays for her now," said Mrokota, "for the Princess loves her very well, but not so much as she loved Danusia."

"Which Jagienka?" asked Zbyszko, astonished.

"Jagienka of Wielgolas, the grand-daughter of the Lord of Wielgolas; a beautiful girl, with whom the Lorrainer is in love."

"Then de Lorche is here?"

"Where else should he be? He came from the hunting lodge, and stayed here because he was comfortable. Our Prince never lacks for guests."

"I shall see him with much pleasure, for he is a blameless knight."

"He loves you also. But let us be going, for the Prince and Princess will soon be at table."

In the dining-hall large logs were burning in two fireplaces. There were many guests and courtiers. The Prince entered first, accompanied by the Palatine. Zbyszko bowed low, and then kissed his hand.

The Prince pressed his hand, and then, taking him aside, said:

"I know all about it. At first I was a little angry, because you acted without my permission, but, to tell the truth, there was not much time; and then, when a woman wishes to accomplish anything, she must not be contradicted, for it is useless."

Zbyszko bent again to the Prince's knees and said:

"May God permit me to repay Your Highness for this!"

"We ought to bless His name that you are now well. Tell the Princess that I have received you kindly; she will be glad. As I love God, her pleasure is my pleasure. I will speak a good word to Jurand on your behalf, and I think he will grant permission, for he too loves the Princess."

"Even if he be unwilling to give her to me, he must, for my right is the first."

"Your right is the first, and he will be bound to consent; but he can refuse you his blessing. You cannot take it from him by force; and without a father's blessing there is no God's blessing either."

Zbyszko became sorrowful, for this had not occurred to him before. At this moment, however, the Princess entered with Jagienka of Wielgolas and the other ladies of the Court. Zbyszko stepped forward and bowed to the lady, who received him even more kindly than the Prince, and hastened to tell him that Jurand was expected. "Here are their plates," she said; "and the men have been sent to conduct them through the snow. It is impossible to wait any longer with the supper, as the lord does not like it; but I am sure they will come before the supper is over."

"As to Jurand," continued the Princess, "it will be according to God's inspiration. I shall tell him everything either to-night or to-morrow after mass, and the

Prince has promised to add his words also. Jurand is hard, but not to those he loves and not to those to whom he is indebted."

She went towards the Prince, for whom the lackeys placed a chair. But before he sat down a servant handed him a silver plate with wafers, which the Prince, in accordance with Christmas custom, was about to break with the guests, the courtiers, and the servants. A similar one was being handed to the Princess by a handsome youth, the son of a castellan of Sochaczew. At the other end of the table stood Father Wyszoniak, who was about to bless the supper. Suddenly a man, covered with snow, appeared at the door and shouted:

"Gracious Lord!"

"What do you wish?" exclaimed the Prince, angry that the ceremony should be interrupted.

"Some travellers have been buried in the snow on the Radom road. We must have more people to dig them out."

The news sent a chill through all present, and the Prince, turning to the castellan of Sochaczew, shouted:

"Horsemen with spades, quick!"

Then to the man who had brought the news he said:

"How many are buried?"

"We could not guess. It blows dreadfully. There are some horses and waggons—a numerous retinue."

"Do you know who it is?"

"They say it is the Lord of Spychow."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HEARING the dreadful news, Zbyszko, without asking the Prince's permission, gave orders to saddle the horses. The Czech, who, as a shield-bearer of gentle birth, was present in the dining-hall, did not attempt to stop the young lord, for he knew that it would be useless, and that the delay might prove dangerous. He then mounted another horse, took a few torches from the porter standing in the doorway, and rushed out along with the Prince's men, under the energetic lead of the old castellan. They would probably have lost their way had it not been for the man who had brought the news of the mishap, and who now conducted them more surely and swiftly, for he had with him a dog familiar with the road.

On the open plain the sharp wind cut their faces, particularly when they galloped. The road was covered with deep snow, and in some places the horses frequently sank in the snow-drifts. The Prince's men rode on amid the smoke and flames of their torches and fire-pots, which the wind blew with such strength that it was difficult to prevent them being carried away into the fields and woods. The way was long; they passed the villages situated near Ciechanow, then Niedzborz, and turned towards Radzanow. Beyond Niedzborz the storm decreased, and the clouds began to break. Here and there in the fissures of the clouds some stars appeared. The horses began to snort; the horsemen breathed more easily. The cold increased every moment, while the stars grew more numerous. Then everything became quiet.

De Lorche, who rode beside Zbyszko, began to comfort the youth, telling him that Jurand, seeing the peril, would most assuredly think before everything of the safety of his daughter, and even if the others were all frozen, she would surely be alive. But Zbyszko did not understand him very well, and had not much time to

listen to him, for presently the guide, who was riding on in front, turned off from the high road. The young knight followed him.

"Why do we turn?" he asked.

"Because they are buried in the snow, not on the road, but over there! Do you see that grove of elder trees?" And he pointed to the dark bushes in the distance, which one could see on the white snowy plain, the clouds having dispersed, while the moon shone brightly.

"Then they have lost their way?"

"Yes, they have lost their way, and they have turned towards the river. During a snowstorm that might very easily happen."

"How did you find them?"

"The dog found them."

"Are there any houses near here?"

"There are, but on the other side of the river Wkra, which is over there."

"Let us hasten!" shouted Zbyszko.

But it was easier to give the order than to execute it, for the snow had not yet frozen in the meadow, and was so deep that they were obliged to advance slowly. Suddenly they heard the barking of the dog, and immediately in front of them stood out the thick hump-backed trunk of a willow, through the bare branches of which shone the bright light of the moon.

"The others are further on," said the guide, "near the grove of elder trees; but there is some one here."

"There is a snow-drift under the willow."

Some of the horsemen dismounted and lighted the torches.

"There is a man under the snow!" one of them exclaimed; "I can see his head!"

"There is also a horse!" exclaimed another.

"Dig up!"

The spades were at once plunged into the snow, which was thrown up on both sides. After a while they saw a man sitting under the tree, his head bent forward, and his face covered with a cap pulled well over his head. With one hand he held the reins of his horse. The man had evidently been separated from the retinue; in all probability he had endeavoured to reach some house to bring help, and when his horse had fallen had taken shelter under the willow, and there been frozen.

"A light!" shouted Zbyszko.

A servant approached with a torch, and held it to the face of the frozen man; it was difficult to recognise his features. It was only when a second servant had raised his head that all exclaimed:

"The Pan of Spychow!"

Zbyszko ordered two men to carry him to the nearest house. As for himself, without losing a moment, he rushed with the other men and the guide to the rescue of the retinue. As he rode, he thought that he might find Danusia, his wife, dead, and he urged on his horse, sinking in the snow up to his breast. Fortunately, it was not far—only a few furlongs. Through the darkness he heard the voices of those who had been left near the buried men. Zbyszko dismounted.

"To the spades!" he cried.

Two sledges had already been dug out by the men who had been sent on before. The people and the horses were hopelessly frozen. One could see where there were other teams by the mounds of snow. Beside some of them one could see the horses, leaning against the snow-drifts, frozen in their last effort to move onward. Near one of the teams stood a man with a spear in his hand, sunk to his waist in the snow, and motionless as a post; in the other sledges the drivers were frozen, holding the horses by their heads. Evidently death had seized them just as they were trying to rescue the animals from the snow-drifts. One sledge was not covered at all; the driver was sitting in front, with his hands near his ears; behind him lay two men, who appeared to be quietly sleeping, the snow covering them like a white blanket. But the others were lost, fighting with the snowstorm to the last, for they lay dead in the attitude of struggling. A few of the sledges were overturned, with their beams broken. Men were found in and near them, but there were no women. Zbyszko worked so hard with a spade that the sweat ran down his face; from time to time he lifted a body, looking at it with throbbing heart, but among them he did not perceive the beloved face. All was in vain! The flame lighted only the fierce moustached faces of Spychow warriors, but there was neither Danusia nor any other woman.

"Your Grace," said the Czech at length, "we are searching and riding in vain; the lady of Spychow is not in the retinue."

"To the highway!" answered Zbyszko.

"We shall not find her on the highway either. I looked well for women's clothes, but there were none. The lady must have remained at Spychow."

Zbyszko was struck by the shrewdness of the remark.

"God grant it may be as you say!" he answered.

"Had she been in any sledge," said the Czech, "the old lord would not have left her; he would have taken her on his horse in front of him, and we should have found her."

"Let us go there once more," said Zbyszko uneasily, for it occurred to him that it might be as the Czech suggested. What if they had not searched carefully enough!

What if Jurand had taken her on horseback with him, and then, when the horse had fallen, Danusia had left her father in the hope of finding help. In that case she might be somewhere in the snow not far from him.

But, as if guessing his master's thoughts, the Czech said:

"In that case clothes would have been found in some of the sledges, for she could not go to the Court with only the dress she was wearing."

They, however, went back to the willow, but neither under nor round about it could they find anything. Jurand had already been carried to Niedzborz, and nothing now stirred all round about. The Czech remarked that the dog which had discovered Jurand must also have found the lady. Only then did Zbyszko breathe freely, for he was now almost certain that Danusia had remained at home. Danusia, he surmised, had evidently told her father everything, and he, not being in favour of the marriage, had left her at home, while he went alone to see the Prince in order to ask his protection against the bishop. As he thought thus, Zbyszko could not resist a certain feeling of joy, for he knew that, with Jurand's death, all obstacles would be removed.

"God's will! God's will!" he repeated to himself. Suddenly, however, he became ashamed of his intense joy, and, turning to the Czech, said:

"I am very sorry for him; I say it with all sincerity."

"They say that the Germans are as much afraid of him as they are of death," answered the shield-bearer. Then, after a while, he asked:

"Shall we now return to the castle?"

"By Niedzborz," answered Zbyszko.

At the castle of Niedzborz they were received by the old nobleman, Zelech. They did not find Jurand there any longer, but Zelech told them some good news.

"They rubbed him over with snow, almost to the bones," said he; "they poured wine into his mouth, and gave him a hot bath, and only then did he begin to breathe."

"Is he alive?" asked Zbyszko eagerly and joyfully, for the news made him forget his own affairs.

"Yes, he is alive, but God knows whether he will live, for the soul does not love to return half way."

"But why have you taken him from here?"

"Because of the Prince's orders. They covered him with all the feather beds they could find in the house, and so he was sent away."

"Did he say anything about his daughter?"

"He had hardly begun to breathe; he had not yet recovered his speech."

"And the others?"

"The others were already dead, poor fellows. They will not be able to attend the Christmas mass, except that read by the Lord Jesus in heaven."

"Not one alive?"

"Not one. Let us go indoors; if you wish to see them, they are lying in the kitchen. Come!"

But they were in haste, and did not enter, although old Zelech urged them, for he was glad to catch some one with whom he could talk. It was a long way from Niedzborz to Ciechanow, and Zbyszko was burning with impatience to see Jurand and hear his news.

So they rode off as fast as they could over the snow-covered highway. It was already past midnight when they reached Ciechanow, and the Christmas mass had just ended in the chapel of the castle.

After mass the Princess came to Zbyszko with a sorrowful face, and asked him:

"What of Danusia?"

"She is not there. Has not Jurand spoken, for I heard he was alive?"

"Merciful Jesus! God's punishment and woe upon us! Jurand has not spoken, and he lies like a log."

"Gracious lady, do not fear; Danusia has remained in Spychow."

"How do you know?"

"Because there were no clothes in any of the sledges. He would not have taken her with but one sheepskin coat."

"That is true, as God is dear to me!" said she joyfully.

She was nevertheless puzzled to understand why Jurand should have come without the girl.

"But why did he leave her?" she asked.

Zbyszko explained to her what he thought might be the cause. His thoughts seemed to her to be reasonable, and she was no longer afraid.

"Now Jurand will be thankful to us for having saved his life," said she, "and, for that matter, to you also, for you went to his aid. He would have had a stone over his breast had he opposed longer! There is God's warning to him in all this: he must not trifle with Holy Sacrament. As soon as he is able to understand I will speak to him immediately."

"He must first come to his senses, for we do not yet know why he did not take Danusia with him. What if she is ill?"

"Do not talk nonsense! I suffer enough already, as she is not here. Were she ill, he would not have left her."

They then went to see Jurand. The room was very warm and well lighted; in the fireplace burned great logs of pine. Father Wyszoniak was watching the sufferer, who lay on the bed covered with bearskins. His face was pale, his eyes were closed, and his hair was wet with perspiration. His mouth was open, and he panted so heavily that the skins with which he was covered were disturbed by his heavy breathing.

"How is he?" asked the Princess.

"I have poured a pitcher of warm wine down his throat," answered Father Wyszoniak, "and now he is in a violent perspiration."

"Have you spoken to him?"

"Yes, I have, but he did not answer, and I think he will not speak before morning."

"We will wait, then," said the Princess.

Father Wyszoniak tried to persuade her to go to bed, but she would not listen. She was anxious to equal Queen Jadwiga in all Christian virtues, in taking care of the sick and in trying to redeem, by her own merits, her

father's soul. She would not, therefore, miss any opportunity of appearing as a Christian in a country which had been for centuries more zealous than others; by so doing she would try to efface the remembrance that she had been born a pagan. She was impatient, moreover, to learn from Jurand news of Danusia, as she was not quite easy about her; so, having seated herself near the bed, she began to recite the rosary, and then to doze.

Zbyszko, not being well yet, and being very tired with his long ride, soon followed her example, and in an hour they were both sleeping so soundly that probably they would have slept until the morning if they had not been awakened by the chapel bell.

But the ringing also wakened Jurand, who, opening his eyes, sat up on the bed and began to look about him.

"Jesus Christ be praised! . . . How do you feel?" asked the Princess.

He had not yet recovered his senses, for he looked at her as if he did not recognise her. Presently he shouted:

"Come here! Dig up the drift!"

"In heaven's name, you are now at Ciechanow!" said the lady again.

Jurand frowned like a man collecting his thoughts with difficulty, and answered:

"In Ciechanow? . . . Then the child is waiting, and . . . the Prince and the Princess . . . Danusia! Danusia!"

And closing his eyes, he suddenly fell back on the pillows. Zbyszko and the Princess thought he was dead, but immediately he began to breathe deeply like a man seized with a deep slumber.

Father Wyszoniak put his finger to his lips, and made a sign not to wake him.

"He may sleep the whole day!" he whispered.

"Yes; but what did he say?" asked the Princess.

"He said that the child was waiting in Ciechanow," answered Zbyszko.

"He has not yet come to his senses," explained the priest.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FATHER WYSZONIEK feared that, even if Jurand did awake, it would be long before he recovered his senses. In the meantime he promised the Princess and Zbyszko that he would let them know as soon as the old knight had recovered, and when they withdrew he went to bed. Jurand, however, had not only awakened on the second feast-day before noon, but had completely recovered his senses. The Princess and Zbyszko were then present. Sitting up on his bed, Jurand looked at her, recognised her, and said:

"Gracious lady! . . . Good heaven! then I am in Ciechanow?"

"And you have overslept the festival!" answered the lady.

"I was buried in the snow. Who rescued me?"

"This knight here, Zbyszko of Bogdaniec. You remember him in Krakow?"

Jurand looked with his one good eye on the youth and said:

"I do remember. . . . And where is Danusia?"

"Was she not with you?" asked the Princess, alarmed.

"How could she be with me, if I was coming to her?"

Zbyszko and the Princess looked at each other, thinking that Jurand had still some fever. Then the lady said:

"Come to your senses, for God's sake! Was not the girl with you?"

"The girl? With me?" asked Jurand, astonished.

"Your men are all dead, but she was not among them. Why have you left her in Spychow?"

And he repeated, with a tremor in his voice, "In Spychow, gracious lady! She was with you, and not with me!"

"But you sent for her to the hunting lodge—your own people, with a letter!"

"In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," said Jurand, "I did not send for her at all!"

The Princess grew suddenly pale.

"What does this mean?" she said. "Are you sure that you have your senses?"

"For God's mercy, where is my child?" cried Jurand, rising.

Hearing this, Father Wyszoniak suddenly left the room, and the Princess again spoke.

"Listen!" she said. "An armed retinue came with a letter from you; it was there written that, during the fire you had been struck by a beam, that you were almost completely blind, and that you wished to see the girl again. So they took Danusia and went away. . . ."

"Woe! Woe!" exclaimed Jurand. "As God is in heaven, neither was there any fire in Spychow, nor did I send for her!"

In that moment Father Wyszoniak returned with a letter, which he handed to Jurand, asking:

"Was not that written by your priest?"

"I do not know."

"And the seal?"

"The seal is mine. What does the letter contain?"

Father Wyszoniak read the letter, while Jurand listened, holding his head with his hands.

"The letter is forged!" he exclaimed, when he had heard the contents. "The seal is counterfeit! Woe to my soul! They have seized my child, and they will kill her!"

"Who?"

"The Knights of the Cross!"

"For God's sake!" exclaimed the lady. "We must tell the Prince about it. He must send envoys to the Grand Master. Merciful Jesus, rescue her and help her!"

She rushed out of the room. Jurand leaped from his bed and began feverishly to clutch his enormous body. Zbyszko, who had sat like a stone, now began to gnash his teeth threateningly.

"How do you know that the Krzyzaks have carried her away?" asked Father Wyszoniak.

"I can swear it by our Lord's Passion!"

"Wait! It may be they came to complain against you. They desired your punishment——"

"And they have carried her away!" exclaimed Zbyszko suddenly.

With these words he rushed from the room and went to the stables. He ordered the horses to be saddled and the waggons to be got ready, scarcely knowing what he was about—only that he must go to the rescue of Danusia, and that without delay; that he must go to Prussia, and take her from his foe's clutches or perish.

He then returned to the room in order to tell Jurand that the arms and the horses would soon be ready. He was sure that Jurand would let him go with him. He had wrath, grief, and sorrow in his heart, but he did not despair, for he felt that in concert with the dreadful Knight of Spychow, he might accomplish anything—that together they might attack the whole strength of the Knights of the Cross.

Besides Jurand, Father Wyszoniak, and the lady, he found in the room the Prince, de Lorche, and the old Lord of Dlugolas. The Prince, having been told of the affair, had called Dlugolas into the council, because of his wisdom and great familiarity with the Knights of the Cross, with whom he had spent long years of captivity.

"We must act with caution; we must not spoil anything by rage, or expose the girl to peril," spoke the Pan of Dlugolas. "We must first complain to the Grand Master; if Your Highness will give me a letter to him, I will carry it myself."

"I will give you a letter," said the Prince. "We will not let the child be murdered, so help me God and Holy Cross! The Grand Master fears a war with Poland, and is anxious to have me and my brother Semko on his side. . . . I am sure that he has not given orders to carry her away, and that he will have her returned."

"But suppose it was by his order?" said Father Wyszoniak.

"No," answered the Prince; "for although he is a Krzyzak, he is more honest than the others. It is as I tell you, and he will rather please me than make me angry. Jagiello's might is no jest. . . . Hah! They were long a thorn in our side, but now they see that if we Mazovians help Jagiello they will be in danger."

"It is true," said the Lord of Dlugolas. "The Knights of the Cross never do anything for nothing. If they have carried her away it is only because they want to disarm Jurand, or to take ransom by exchanging her." Here he turned to the Lord of Spychow.

"Whom have you now among your prisoners?" he asked.

"Von Bergow," answered Jurand.

"Is he of any importance?"

"He seems to be."

De Lorche, having heard the name of von Bergow, asked about him, and on receiving an answer, said:

"He is a relative of Count Geldryj, a great benefactor of the Order; his family has rendered it great services."

"That is why von Danveld and von Loeve demanded his release so vehemently," said the Prince. "No sooner had one of them opened his mouth than he said that von Bergow must be set free. As God is in heaven, it is certain that they have carried the girl away, in order to free von Bergow."

"They will therefore return her," said the priest.

"But it would be well to know where she is," said the Lord of Dlugolas. "For if the Grand Master should ask: 'Whom shall I order to restore her?' what should we answer?"

"Where she is!" said Jurand gloomily. "She would not be near the frontier, for they would be afraid lest I should rescue her; they have carried her to some distant place."

"We shall find her and rescue her!" said Zbyszko.

"Dog-brothers!" the Prince exclaimed angrily. "They have carried her away from my house; therefore they have brought shame upon me, and I will never forgive them as long as I live. I have had enough of their treachery—enough of their invasions! Better have wolves for one's neighbours! But now the Grand Master must punish them, restore the girl, send envoys to me and present excuses, otherwise I will declare war."

Here he struck the table with his fist, and added:

"My brother of Plock will go with me, and Witold and King Jagiello's might! Enough of indulgence!"

All became silent, waiting until he should become calm. As for the Princess Anna Danuta, she was glad that the Prince was taking Danusia's cause to heart, for she knew that, although patient, he was vengeful, and that if once he decided upon anything he would not give it up until he had accomplished it.

"There used to be discipline in the Order," said Father Wyszoniak at length, "and none of the komthurs dared

act without the Grand Master's permission. But now there is no discipline among them, neither truth, nor honesty, nor faith—nothing but the avidity of wolves rather than of human beings. How can they obey the Grand Master if they do not obey God's commandments? Everyone lives in his castle like an independent prince, and they help each other in their evil deeds. If we complain to the Grand Master, they will deny everything. The Grand Master will command them to return the girl, but they will not do so, or else they will answer: 'We have her not, and we have not carried her away.' If he should ask them to swear, they will swear. What then shall we do?"

"Jurand must go to Spychow," said the Lord of Dlugolas. "If they have carried her away they will let Jurand know it."

"She was carried off by those who came to the hunting lodge," said the priest.

"Who came to the hunting lodge?" asked Jurand.

"They were von Danveld, old von Loewe, and the two brothers, Gottfried and Rotgier," answered the priest. "They complained, and wanted the Prince to give an order for the release of von Bergow, but the Prince, learning that the Germans had been the first to attack, reproved them, and sent them away without any satisfaction."

"Go to Spychow," said the Prince, "for they will notify you. They will send you the child in exchange for von Bergow, but I will not forego my revenge, nevertheless, for they have brought shame upon me."

"They will deny everything," said Father Wyszoniek.

"They will not be able, for they must tell Jurand that they have her," answered Mikolaj of Dlugolas. "I do not believe they have her on the frontier; they have carried her to some more distant castle; but if we have a proof of their guilt they cannot resist the command of the Grand Master."

Jurand then began to repeat in a strange and terrible voice:

"Danveld—Loewe—Gottfried—Rotgier."

Mikolaj of Dlugolas advised that some keen men well acquainted with Prussia should be sent to Szczytno and Insburk, in order to learn whether Jurandowna was there, and, if not, then where she had been carried. The Prince went out to give orders, while the Princess turned to Jurand, wishing to comfort him with a kind word.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

For a while he did not answer, as if he had not heard the question. Then he said suddenly:

"As if my old wound had been opened."

"But you must trust God's mercy! Danusia will return, but you must give them back von Bergow."

"I would not spare even my own blood."

The Princess was uncertain whether she ought not to tell him at once about the marriage, but, having thought for a time, she resolved not to add a new sorrow to Jurand's great grief. "He will search for her with Zbyszko," she thought. "Let Zbyszko tell him; now he might suffer too much.

"You must not blame us," she said; "men in your own livery came with a letter sealed with your coat of arms; they said that you were ill and fast losing your sight, and that you wished to see your child once more. How could we oppose and not fulfil the father's wish?"

Jurand bowed to her knees and said:

"Gracious lady, I do not blame anyone."

"And you must know that God will restore her to you, for His eye watches over her. He will send her help as He did in the last hunting party, when the urus attacked us, and the Lord Jesus inspired Zbyszko to defend us. He nearly lost his life, and was ill a very long time; but he had rescued Danusia and myself, and for that the Prince gave him his spurs and belt. You see, God's hand is over her. I am very sorry for the child, for I thought that she would have come with you, and that I should then have seen my dearest girl; but——"

Her voice trembled, and the tears flowed from her eyes. Jurand's despair, stifled until now, burst out like a whirlwind. He tore his long hair with his hands, and, striking his head against the wall, groaned with a hard voice and sobbed:

"Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!"

But Zbyszko approached, and, seizing him by the arm, shouted:

"Let us be going! To Spychow!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHOSE retinue is that?" asked Jurand suddenly.

They were near Radzanow, and he had just roused himself from his brooding meditations.

"Mine!" answered Zbyszko.

"Are all my men dead?"

"I saw them in Niedzborz; they were all dead."

"My poor old companions!"

Zbyszko made no reply, and they rode on silently. They wished to reach Spychow as soon as possible, expecting to see there some envoys from the Knights of the Cross. Towards evening Jurand spoke again, and asked about those brothers of the Order who had come to the hunting lodge. Zbyszko told him all about their complaints, about their departure, about de Fourcy's death, about the deed of his own shield-bearer, who had broken von Danveld's arm so terribly; and, during his narration, one other circumstance came to his mind—the presence in the forest-house of the woman who had brought the healing balm from von Danveld. At the baiting place, therefore, he asked the Czech and Sanderus about her, but neither knew precisely what had become of her. It seemed to them that she had gone away either with the men who came to take Danusia, or else soon after them. Zbyszko now thought that she had been sent to warn the men if Jurand himself should come to the forest-house. In that case they would not have said that they were from Spychow, but would have had another letter ready to hand to the Prince instead of the forged one from Jurand. all this had been arranged with diabolical astuteness; and the young knight, who, until now, had known the Knights of the Cross only on the battlefield, saw for the first time that the mailed fist was not enough for them, but that they must be fought with cunning as well.

He wished, however, to speak with Jurand first, and he

postponed the whole business, more particularly as the night was advancing, and it seemed to him that Jurand, sitting on his lofty saddle, had fallen asleep with grief and weariness. But Jurand rode with bowed head because his heart was full of fearful apprehensions. At last he broke the silence.

"I would rather have died near Niedzborz!" he said.

"Was it you who dug me out?"

"Yes; I, with the others."

"And during the hunting party was it you who rescued my child?"

"How could I have done otherwise?"

"And will you help me now?"

At that moment there arose in Zbyszko's breast such a love of Danusia and such a hatred of the Knights of the Cross, that he rose up in his saddle and, speaking through his clenched teeth, cried:

"Listen to me! Even if I had to bite through the Prussian castles with my teeth, I would do so to rescue her!"

There was a moment of silence. Jurand's vengeful and violent nature had evidently awakened in all its strength under the influence of Zbyszko's words, for he began to gnash his teeth, and to repeat the names:

"Danveld—Loewe—Rotgier—Gottfried!"

They did not close their eyes all night, and in the morning they hardly recognised each other, so much had their faces changed. Jurand was so struck with Zbyszko's grief and wrath that at last he said:

"I know that she covered you with her veil, and saved you from death. Do you love her, then?"

Zbyszko looked him straight in the face.

"She is my wife," he answered boldly.

Jurand reined in his horse, and gazed at Zbyszko in astonishment.

"What do you say?" he asked.

"I say that she is my wife, and that I am her husband."

The Knight of Spychow covered his eyes with his gloved hand, as if he had been suddenly blinded by a thunderbolt; he did not say anything, but, urging his horse, rode on at the head of the cavalcade.

But Zbyszko could not bear riding behind him, and said to himself: "I would rather see him burst into a

passion than remain silent." So, riding up to him and touching his stirrup, he began to explain :

"Listen how it was," he said. "You know what Danusia did for me at Krakow, but you do not know that at Bogdaniec they wanted me to marry Jagienka, the daughter of Zych of Zgorzelice. My uncle, Macko, wished it; her father, Zych, wished it; and my kinsman, the abbot, a very rich man, wished it. The girl was very pretty, and had a big dowry. But it could not be. I pitied Jagienka, but still more did I pity Danusia, so I went to her in Mazovia, for, to tell the truth, I could not live without her. Remember that you, too, have been in love; remember, and you will not wonder."

Zbyszko paused, hoping that Jurand would speak, but, finding that he was still silent, the young knight continued :

"In the forest-house God willed that I should rescue her and the Princess from a urus, and the lady at once said: 'Now Jurand will no longer oppose, for how could he repay him for such a deed?' But even then I did not intend to take her without your permission. Nor could I at that time, for I was dreadfully beaten by the beast. But afterwards, as you know, the men came to take Danusia, apparently to conduct her to Spychow. I was still ill in bed. I thought I should never see her again. I thought you would marry her to some one else, for in Krakow you were against me. I thought I should have died! Ah! Mighty God! What a night it was! I imagined that if she went away, the sun would never rise again. You must try to understand a man's love and grief."

His voice trembled, but, being a brave youth, he overcame his emotion.

"The men came in the evening," he said, "and they wished to take her away directly, but the Princess ordered them to wait until the next day. All at once the Lord Jesus inspired me with the thought of bowing before the Princess and asking her for Danusia. I thought that if I died it would be my only consolation. Recollect, your daughter had to go, while I was ill and almost dying. The Prince was absent, and the lady hesitated. But at length both, along with the priest, had pity on me, and Father Wyszoniek married us. God's might, God's right!"

But Jurand gloomily interrupted :

"God's punishment also!"

"Why should there be punishment?" asked Zbyszko. "Only remember that they had already sent for her before the marriage, and had it been done or not, they would have taken her away just the same."

Jurand was again silent, and rode on with a face so impassive that Zbyszko was afraid, although at first he had felt better, as one always does after confessing a secret. He began to think over the business with increasing fear that the old knight would remain unrelenting, and that they would in future become foes.

They now came to an inn, where Jurand had formerly stopped when travelling to the Prince's Court. Zbyszko and Jurand soon found themselves in a private room. Suddenly Jurand stepped in front of the young knight and, looking at him searchingly, asked:

"Then it is for her sake that you have come?"

"Do you think I shall deny it?" he exclaimed, looking straight into Jurand's eyes, and ready to burst with anger; but there was no rancour in the face of the old warrior, only an almost unfathomable sadness.

"Did you rescue my child?"

Zbyszko gazed at him in astonishment and fear lest Jurand had taken leave of his senses, for he repeated the same question he had asked before.

"Sit down," said he, "for it seems to me that you are not quite well yet."

But Jurand raised his hands, and, placing them on Zbyszko's shoulders, suddenly drew him with all his strength to his breast. The youth, overcoming his astonishment, seized him by the waist, and thus they embraced each other for a long time, bound to one another by a common grief and sorrow. When they released each other, Zbyszko clasped the old knight's knees, and then began to kiss his face and hands.

"You will not oppose me now?" he asked.

To this Jurand answered:

"I was opposed, because I had offered her to God."

"You offered her to God, and God has given her to me! It is His will!"

"His will!" repeated Jurand, "but now we need His mercy."

"Whom should God help if not the father who seeks his child, if not the husband who seeks his wife? He will not help the robbers."

"But they have carried her away all the same," answered Jurand.

"Will you restore them von Bergow?"

"I will give them anything they wish."

The thought of the Knights of the Cross aroused in him the old hatred, which consumed him like a flame, for presently he continued through his clenched teeth:

"And I will add that which they do not wish!"

"I, too, have sworn vengeance!" answered Zbyszko; "and now we must be going to Spychow."

He ordered the servants to have the horses saddled forthwith, and they proceeded on their journey, although dusk was already falling. As the way was so long, and the cold was increasing in its intensity, Jurand and Zbyszko, who had not yet recovered their strength, rode in a sledge. Zbyszko spoke of his uncle, Macko, whom he was longing to see, and regretted that he was not with them, for his bravery and cunning would have been useful against such foes as theirs.

"Are you cunning?" he asked Jurand, "for I am not so, by any means."

"I am not," answered Jurand. "I shall fight them not with cunning, but with this hand and with this grief, which has remained in me."

"I understand," said the young knight; "I know also that I love Danusia, and that they have carried her away. God prevent that——"

He did not finish what he was about to say, for, as he spoke, he felt that he had not a human, but a wolf's heart.

For a while they rode on in silence over the white road bathed in the moonlight, and as they rode Jurand began to talk as if to himself.

"Had they a reason for vengeance against me it would be different! But, as there is a God, they have not! I have fought them on the battlefield, but here I was as good as a neighbour ought to be. Barton Nalencz captured forty knights on their way to the Knights of the Cross, and chained and shut them up in the dungeon at Kozmin. The Krzyzaks were obliged to give him a bag of money in exchange for them. As for me, I used to receive hospitably every knight on his way to the Krzyzaks. Sometimes the Krzyzaks used even to visit me. I was never hard on them, but to me they have done that which, even to-day, I would not do to my worst foe."

And dreadful memories began to torment him more and more, his voice sank in his throat, and his words sounded almost like a moan.

"They took my dear wife, they seized her like a dog, and she died on a halter. Now they have taken my child. Jesus! Jesus!"

Again there was silence. Zbyszko turned his face towards the moonlight in great astonishment, then, looking at Jurand, he said:

"Father! For heaven's sake it were better for them to deserve human love than vengeance! Why do they wrong all nations and all men?"

Jurand, extending his arms pathetically, answered sadly:

"I do not know!"

For a time Zbyszko's thoughts were of his own affairs, but soon they returned to Jurand.

"They say that you have well avenged yourself," said he.

"Because I have sworn," said he. "But I also promised God that, if He would permit me to accomplish my vengeance, I would give Him my only child. That is why I was against you. And now I do not know whether it was His will, or whether you have aroused His anger by your deed."

"I have told you already," said Zbyszko, "that even if I had not married her, the dog-brothers would have taken her all the same. God has fulfilled your wish, and has given Danusia to me, for we could do nothing without His will."

"Every sin is against His will."

"Yes, a sin, but not a sacrament, for a sacrament is of God."

"Then why is there no help?"

"You must not say a word of that, for no one could help you better against those robbers than I. You shall see, I will repay them for Danusia, and if there is one of those left alive who seized your wife, deliver him to me, and you shall see."

But Jurand shook his head, and said gloomily:

"No, there is no one alive."

For some time the only sound heard was the snorting of the horses and the muffled sound of their shoes as they struck the hard snow.

"Once during the night," Jurand continued, "I heard a voice, as it were, coming from the wall, and it said to me: 'Enough of vengeance!' But I did not obey, for it was not my dead wife's voice."

"And what have your priests said of this?"

"The priest has blessed the castle, and has told me to abandon revenge, but it could not be. I grew too hard towards them, and afterwards they themselves sought vengeance. Last time they lay in ambush and challenged me. Meineger and von Bergow were the first to challenge me."

"Have you ever taken ransom?"

"Never. Of those I have captured, von Bergow will be the first to come out alive."

The conversation now ceased, for from the highway they had turned into a narrow, winding road, which was made difficult by the snow-drifts. In wet weather during spring or summer the road was almost impracticable.

"Are we near Spychow already?" asked Zbyszko.

"Yes," answered Jurand; "there is a forest here, and then marshes, in the middle of which the castle stands. Beyond the marshes there are meadows and fields, but the castle can only be reached by a dam. Several times the Germans have attempted to capture me, but they have not done so. The bones of many of them are mouldering in the woods."

"It is difficult even to find the way," said Zbyszko. "If the Krzyzaks have sent some one with letters, how will he find you?"

"They have sent many times before; they have men who are familiar with the road."

"I wish we may find them in Spychow!" said Zbyszko.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HIS wish was accomplished sooner than the young knight had thought, for when they passed out into the open, marshy plain, in the middle of which the castle of Spychow was situated, they saw before them two horsemen and a sledge, in which two dark figures were seated. The night was clear, so that on the white background everything could be very plainly seen. The hearts of Jurand and Zbyszko beat high, for who should be coming to Spychow during the night if not the envoys of the Knights of the Cross. Zbyszko ordered the driver to hasten, and they were soon near enough to be seen. The two horsemen, with their crossbows ready, then turned towards them, and called out:

"Wer da?"

"Germans!" whispered Jurand to Zbyszko. Then, raising his voice, he said:

"It is my right to ask, and yours to answer. Who are you?"

"Travellers."

"What travellers?"

"Pilgrims."

"Where from?"

"From Szczytno."

"It is they!" whispered Jurand again.

By this time the two sledges were driving side by side, and in front of them six horsemen now appeared. They were the Spychow guard, which constantly watched the dam leading to the castle both day and night. Several enormous bloodhounds leaped beside the horses.

The guard, recognising Jurand, gave a shout of welcome, but they were astonished that the lord had returned so soon. As for him, he turned to the strangers.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To Spychow."

"For what?"

"That we can only tell the lord alone."

Jurand almost had it on his lips to say, "I am the Lord of Spychow!" but he refrained, for he knew that he could not talk with them in the presence of his men. Having asked them whether they had any letters, and learning that their orders were to carry their message verbally, he requested them to drive on as quickly as possible. Zbyszko also was so impatient to hear tidings of Danusia that he was unable to pay attention to anything else. He was still more impatient when other guards stopped them twice, and again at being obliged to wait while they lowered the drawbridge over the moat, behind which stood an enormous palisade. Besides the driver and the horse-men, intended for its defence, the embassy from Szczytno was composed of two other persons, one of whom was the woman who had brought the healing balm to the hunting lodge; the other was a young pilgrim. Zbyszko did not recognise the woman, as he had not seen her at the forest-house, but the pilgrim seemed to him to be a shield-bearer in disguise. Jurand at once led the way to a corner room, and stood facing them. He looked gigantic and almost dreadful in the glare of the flames thrown upon him by the logs burning in the fireplace.

"Where is my child?" he asked.

All trembled before him. The pilgrim, although the expression of his face was arrogant, shook like a leaf, and the woman's knees quaked. She looked at Zbyszko, then at the bald head of Father Kaleb; she then turned to Jurand as if to ask what those two men were doing there.

"Sir," she at length answered, "we do not understand your question. We are sent to you on an important errand. But he who sent us commanded that we should speak to you without witnesses."

"I have no secrets from them!" said Jurand.

"But we have, noble lord!" answered the woman; "and if you allow them to remain, we shall have to request you to let us depart to-morrow."

There was anger on the face of Jurand, who was not accustomed to be contradicted. For a while his fallow moustache bristled threateningly, but the thought of Danusia subdued his anger. Zbyszko, who was eager to hear the news as soon as possible, felt sure that Jurand would repeat the conversation to him.

"You had better remain alone!" he said. And, going out with Father Kaleb, he entered the principal room.

"Sir," said the Czech, approaching him, "it is the same woman!"

"What woman?"

"The woman who brought the balm. I recognised her directly, and Sanderus recognised her also. She came to spy us, and I am sure she knows where the lady is."

"We shall know it also!" said Zbyszko.

Meanwhile, in the corner room, as soon as the door had closed upon Zbyszko and Father Kaleb, the sister of the Order hastily approached Jurand and whispered:

"Your daughter was carried away by the robbers."

"With crosses on their mantles?"

"No, sir! But God favoured the pious brothers, and they rescued her, and she is now with them."

"Where is she?"

"Under the protection of pious Brother Schomberg," answered she, crossing her hands on her breast and bending humbly.

Hearing the dreaded name of the executioner of Witold's children, Jurand turned pale as linen. For a time he sat on a bench with closed eyes, rubbing away with his hand the cold perspiration which covered his forehead. Seeing this, the pilgrim, although a short time before he had been trembling with fear, now placed his hands on his hips, sat down on a bench and stretched out his feet, looking haughtily and contemptuously at Jurand. There was a long silence.

"Brother Markward helps Brother Schomberg to take care of her," continued the woman; "she is in good hands, and there will be no harm done to her."

"What must I do to get her back?"

"You must humble yourself before the Order," said the pilgrim sternly.

At these words, Jurand rose, strode up to him, and, bending over him, said, in a low, terrible voice:

"Be silent!"

The pilgrim was again frightened. He knew that he could say something which would restrain Jurand, but he was afraid that, before he could say a word, something dreadful might happen to him. So he was silent, looking with his round, stony eyes on the threatening face of the Lord of Spychow. He sat motionless; only his beard trembled.

"Have you a letter?" asked Jurand, turning to the sister of the Order.

"No, sir, we have no letter. Our message must be spoken!"

"Speak, then!"

As if wishing to make Jurand remember her words well, she said:

"Brother Schomberg and Brother Markward attend the lady, therefore, my lord, you will restrain your anger. But no harm shall happen to her, for although you have wronged the Order for many years, the brothers wish to repay you with good for evil, if you will consent to satisfy their righteous demands."

"What do they wish?"

"They wish you to set free Herr von Bergow."

Jurand breathed deeply.

"I will restore them von Bergow," he answered.

"And the other prisoners in Spychow."

"There are the two shield-bearers of Meineger and von Bergow, besides other servants."

"You must set them free, and recompense them for their imprisonment."

"I will not haggle over my child."

"The pious brothers expected it of you," said the woman. "But that is not all I have to tell you. Your daughter was carried away by certain men, most assuredly robbers, in order to receive from you a rich ransom. God granted to the brothers the privilege of rescuing her, and at present they do not ask anything more from you than that you release their guests and their companions. But the brothers know, and you yourself know, what a hatred exists in this country against them, and how unjustly their most pious deeds are judged. For this reason the brothers are assured that, if the people should hear that your daughter is with them, they will suspect that she has been carried off by them, and thus they would be slandered and accused for their lack of virtue. Yes, the false and wicked people of this country have often treated them thus, and the good reputation of the Order has suffered much. The brothers must see to it; and, therefore, they add one more condition, namely, that you tell the Prince of this province, and all redoubtable knights—and it is the truth—that your daughter was carried off, not by the brothers of the Cross, but by robbers, and that they ransomed her from them."

"It is true," said Jurand, "that robbers captured my child, and that I am obliged to ransom her from the robbers."

"You must not tell even one man differently, for if anyone—even a single soul—should learn that you came to terms with the brothers, if but one complaint should be made to the Grand Master or to the chapters, dreadful difficulties would arise."

There was a look of uneasiness in Jurand's face. At first it seemed to him natural that the komthurs should require secrecy, being afraid of the responsibility and shame; but now a suspicion arose in his mind that there might be some other reason, but as he could not perceive it he was overcome with dread, such as overwhelms even the most courageous when some great peril threatens, not themselves, but their dearest ones. He therefore determined to learn more from the servant of the Order.

"The komthurs require secrecy," said he, "but how can there be secrecy if I release von Bergow and the others in exchange for my child?"

"You must say that you have taken ransom for them in order to pay the others."

"They would not believe it," answered Jurand gloomily, "for I have never taken any ransom."

"Because there has never been any question of your child," answered the servant in a hissing voice.

Again there was silence, and the pilgrim, who had once more recovered his courage, said:

"Such is the will of Brothers Schomberg and Markward."

And the servant continued:

"You must say that this pilgrim brought you the ransom; we will take the noble Lord von Bergow and the other prisoners with us."

"What do you mean?" said Jurand, frowning; "do you think that I shall give you the prisoners before you return me my child?"

"You shall do more. You must yourself go to meet your daughter in Szczytno, whither the brothers will bring her."

"I? To Szczytno?"

"Yes; for if she should again be captured by the robbers, you and your people would suspect the Order; therefore they prefer to give her up only to yourself."

"And who will guarantee that I shall return, if I should go to these wolves myself?"

"The brothers' virtue, righteousness, and piety."

Jurand began to pace the room. He already perceived the treachery, and he was afraid of it; but at the same time he felt that the Knights of the Cross could dictate their conditions to him now that he was helpless. An idea had apparently come to his mind, for he suddenly stopped before the pilgrim, looked sharply at him, and, turning to the woman, said:

"Very well, I will go to Szczytno, but you and this man shall remain here until I return; then I will set free von Bergow and the others."

"If, sir, you do not trust the friars," said the pilgrim, "how can you expect that they will trust and believe you when you say that you will set free von Bergow?"

Jurand's face grew pale with anger, and it seemed for a moment that he would seize the pilgrim and throw him to the ground; but, stifling his anger, he drew a deep breath, and said slowly and distinctly:

"Whoever you are, do not strain my patience too much, or it will break!"

"Tell him what they have ordered you to say," said the pilgrim, turning to the sister.

"Sir," said she, "we would not dare to mistrust your oath made on knightly honour and a sword, but it would not be right for you to take an oath in the presence of common people; moreover, they have not sent us for your oath."

"What, then, have they sent you for?"

"The brothers told us to say that, without telling any one, you were to come to Szczytno with Herr von Bergow and the other prisoners."

At this, Jurand shrugged his shoulders and clutched his fingers like a bird of prey; at length he approached the woman, bent over her as if to whisper in her ear, and said:

"Did they not tell you that I could torture you upon the wheel at Spychow?"

"Your daughter is under the protection of Brothers Schomberg and Markward," answered the sister significantly.

"Robbers! Poisoners! Executioners!" burst out Jurand.

"And they would avenge us, for we were told to say that, if you did not care to fulfil all our commands, it were better the girl died, as Witold's children died. You may choose now."

"And you must understand that you are in the komthurs' power," said the pilgrim; "they do not wish to wrong you, and the commandant of Szczytno promises, through us, that you shall return free from the castle, but they require that you submit yourself to the Knights of the Cross, and beseech the conquerors for mercy. They are willing to pardon you, but before that they wish to bend your proud neck. You accuse them of being traitors and perjurers, therefore they require you to trust their word. They will set your daughter and yourself at liberty, but you must implore them to do it. You have trampled upon them, and you must swear that you will never again raise your hand against the white mantle."

"Such is the komthurs' will," added the woman; "and with them are Markward and Schomberg."

There was a moment of deep silence. It seemed as if somewhere among the beams of the ceiling a remote echo repeated the dread words: "Markward—Schomberg!"

The pilgrim and the woman looked steadily at each other for some time; then at Jurand, who sat motionless, his face deep in the shadow cast upon it by a bunch of skins which hung near the window. There was but one thought in his mind: that if he should not do what the Knights of the Cross asked, they would destroy his child, while if he should do what they required, it might not profit either Danusia or himself. He could see no way to help it. Over him he felt a merciless fate crushing him.

He reflected that, if he went to Szczytno, they would chain him, and put him in prison, and would not set Danusia free, even for the sake of not betraying that they had carried her off. Meanwhile, death was hanging over his only child—death over her dear head! At length his thoughts became confused, and his grief became so great that it turned to torpor. He sat motionless, his body looking as if it had been turned to stone. The envoys now became tired of waiting.

"Daybreak is not far off," said the woman, rising; "allow us, therefore, to go out, sir, for we need rest."

"And some food after so long a journey," added the pilgrim.

Both then bowed to Jurand, and went out.

As for him, he sat immovable, as if he were asleep or dead. Presently the door opened, and Zbyszko, followed by Father Kaleb, entered the room.

"What do they ask?" said the young knight, approaching Jurand.

Jurand shuddered, but did not reply. He began to blink with his eyes like a man just awakening from slumber.

"Are you ill?" said Father Kaleb.

"No," answered Jurand.

"And Danusia?" asked Zbyszko; "where is she, and what did they tell you? For what have they come?"

"With ransom," answered Jurand slowly.

"With ransom for von Bergow?"

"Yes, for von Bergow?"

"What do you mean? What ails you?"

"Nothing."

But in his voice there was something so strange that Zbyszko and the priest were frightened, the more so as Jurand spoke only of ransom, and not of the exchange for Danusia.

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Zbyszko; "where is Danusia?"

"She is not with the Knights of the Cross—no!" answered Jurand in a drowsy voice.

As he spoke he fell like a dead man on the bench, and from the bench to the floor.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NEXT day the envoys saw Jurand about noon and shortly afterwards they went away, taking with them von Bergow, the two shield-bearers, and several other prisoners. Then Jurand called Father Kaleb, to whom he dictated a letter to the Prince, telling him that Danusia had not been carried away by the knights of the Order, but that he knew where she was and hoped to rescue her in a few days. He repeated the same account to Zbyszko, who, since the previous night, had become almost crazed with astonishment and fear. The old warrior, however, refused to answer his questions, but told him to wait patiently, and in the meanwhile not to attempt anything to rescue Danusia, as it was not necessary. Towards evening he closeted himself with Father Kaleb, whom he told to write his will; then he confessed, and, having taken the Communion, he called Zbyszko and old, ever-silent Tolima, who had been his companion in all his expeditions and fights.

"There!" said he, turning to the old soldier and raising his voice as if he were speaking to a man who could not hear well, "there is the husband of my daughter; he married her at the Prince's Court, and has obtained my consent. He shall be your master here after my death, and the lord over the castle, lands, forests, meadows, and all the household in Psychow."

Hearing this, Tolima was very much surprised, and turned his angular head towards Zbyszko and then towards Jurand, but he said nothing, for he was silent almost always. He only bowed and slightly clasped Zbyszko's knees.

"This, my will," continued Jurand, "is written down by Father Kaleb, and beneath the writing there is my seal on the wax. As for you, you will obey this knight in everything as myself."

Tolima nodded, and then bowed and went out.

"But why," asked Zbyszko, "do you give Spychow to me?"

"I have given you more than Spychow. I have given you my child."

"And one cannot tell the hour of one's death," said Father Kaleb.

"One cannot tell," said Jurand sadly. "Not long ago I was buried in the snow, and though God has rescued me, I have not the same strength."

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Zbyszko, "you have changed entirely since yesterday, and are now talking about death instead of Danusia. Do not, for God's sake!"

"It seems to me that some sickness has taken hold of me. I care only for my child. And even you, although I know you love her——"

He paused, and drew a small sword, called a "misericordia," and turned its hilt towards Zbyszko.

"Swear to me, on this cross," he said, "that you will never wrong her, but will love her constantly."

The tears appeared in Zbyszko's eyes. He threw himself on his knees, and, placing one finger on the cross, he exclaimed:

"I swear by the Holy Mother that I will never wrong her, and will love her constantly!"

"Amen!" said Father Kaleb.

Jurand put the "misericordia" in its scabbard, and stretched out his arms, saying:

"You, too, are my child!"

Then they separated, for it was already night, and they had not rested properly for several days. But Zbyszko rose very early, being really afraid that Jurand was ill, and anxious to learn how he had spent the night.

He met Tolima at the door of Jurand's room, from which he had just come out.

"How is the lord? Well?" he asked.

Tolima bowed and, putting his hand to his ear, said:

"Your Grace, what do you require?"

"I ask you how the lord is," repeated Zbyszko more loudly.

"The lord is gone!"

"Gone! Where?"

"I do not know. He had his armour on."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE dawn had begun to light the trees, bushes, and stones scattered here and there about the fields, when the hired guide, walking beside Jurand's horse, stopped and said:

"Let me rest, lord knight, for I am out of breath. It is not much farther."

"You must conduct me to the highway, then you can return," said Jurand.

"The highway lies to the right beyond the woods, and you will see the castle from the hill."

With these words, the peasant began to stroke his hands, for they were cold with the morning's dampness; then, being fatigued, he sat down on a stone.

"Can you tell me if the komthur is in the castle?" asked Jurand.

"Yes, for he is ill."

"What ails him?"

"They say that the Polish knights have beaten him," answered the old peasant. In his voice there was a trace of satisfaction. He was a subject of the Knights of the Cross, but his Mazovian heart was pleased at the success of the Polish knights. "Ah!" he added, after a pause; "our lords are mighty, but they cannot stand against the Poles."

He looked sharply at the knight as if to assure himself that he would not be punished for the words which had escaped him. "You, my lord," said he, "you speak our tongue, you are not a German?"

"No," answered Jurand; "but conduct me farther."

The peasant rose and began to walk beside the horse. As he walked, he thrust his hands in his pocket from time to time, and, pulling out a handful of rye, put it in his mouth.

Presently they entered the woods, which looked grey in the morning light, and exhaled damp vapours. It was

now day, otherwise it would have been difficult for Jurand to follow the narrow path which wound up the hill. But the woods soon ended, and in a few moments they were at the top of the hill, across which ran the highway.

"Here is the road," said the peasant; "you can now go on alone, sir."

"Good!" said Jurand. "You may return home." Putting his hand in a leather bag attached to his saddle, he took from it a silver coin and handed it to the guide. The peasant, more accustomed to receive blows than presents from the knights of the Order, could hardly believe his eyes, and, taking the coin, he seized Jurand's foot.

"Jesus, Mary!" he exclaimed. "May God reward Your Highness."

"Remain with God!"

"May God conduct you! Szczytno lies before you."

He then disappeared. Jurand remained alone on the hill, and looked in the direction pointed out to him by the peasant. Behind the grey curtain of the mist lay hidden the ill-omened castle, towards which he seemed forced by violence and misfortune. It was not far now, and then—what must happen would happen. A new thought was aroused in Jurand's heart. His fear and uneasiness for Danusia made him ready to ransom her from the hands of her foes, even at the cost of his own blood. But now he experienced a bitter feeling of humiliation, which he had never known before. He, Jurand, before whom all the komthurs on the frontier had trembled, was now obliged to obey them. He, who had trampled upon and vanquished so many of them, felt that he himself was now conquered and trampled upon. It seemed to him that the order of the world had been upset. His journey was taken in order that he might humble himself before the Knights of the Cross; yet, if it had not been for Danusia, he might, instead, have been fighting against the whole Order. He knew that shame was about to befall him, and the thought caused him exquisite torment. But he was a man with a heart as well as a body of iron. He could not only break others, but himself as well.

"I will go no further," said he to himself, "until I overcome my anger, by which I shall only lose instead of rescue my child."

He wrestled with himself until he knew that he had vanquished his wrath, and that his will had been thoroughly curbed.

The fog grew less dense, and although it did not disperse entirely, the knight soon discerned a dark object enveloped by it. Jurand guessed that this was the castle of Szczytno. On seeing it he stopped and began to pray fervently, like a man to whom nothing is left in the world but God's mercy.

When at length he moved on, he felt that some consolation had come to his heart. He was now ready to bear anything. Gradually even hope began to rise in his heart. He believed that the Knights of the Cross had captured Danusia only in order to secure him; but now that they had him, of what service could she be to them? They would chain him—there was no doubt about that; and, not wishing to keep him near Mazovia, they would send him to some remote castle, where he would perhaps die in a dungeon; but they would surely release Danusia. Even should it be discovered that they had captured him by some cunning trick, the Grand Master would not blame them for this, for Jurand had been a scourge to the Knights of the Cross, and had shed more of their blood than any other knight in the world. The Grand Master, however, could not but punish them for the imprisonment of an innocent girl, the ward of a Prince whose alliance he wished to obtain in the event of a war with the Polish King.

While he was thus thinking, Jurand's eyes filled with tears, and in his heart there arose an ardent longing. He longed to see his child once more, he longed to die in Spychow beside her and Zbyszko, and not in the dark dungeon of the Knights of the Cross. "But God's will be done!" he said sorrowfully. He could now see Szczytno. The walls appeared more and more distinctly. His hour of humiliation was near.

The highway not only became wider but more animated. Waggon, loaded with straw and wood, were going towards the city. Cattle were being driven in. Men were carrying frozen fish from the lakes. A peasant was being led by a chain held by four archers, apparently to the courts of justice. He had chains, too, on his hands and feet, and could hardly walk through the snow. Seeing Jurand, the archers looked at him curiously, wondering at the

enormous size of the cavalier and his horse. On perceiving the golden spurs and the knightly belt, they lowered their crossbows to the ground, as a sign of greeting and homage. At the inn there was still more movement, and still more people, but all gave way at once to the knight, who passed along the principal street and turned towards the castle, which, enveloped in the fog, seemed to slumber still.

But around it everything was not asleep. At least the crows and ravens were not, for great numbers of these birds were flying about the gate, beating their wings and cawing. Jurand, as he approached, soon understood the cause of their activity. Near the gate he beheld a great gibbet, on which hung four Mazovian peasants. As he drew near the birds flew noisily away, but soon returned and settled on the gibbet. Jurand passed by, made the sign of the cross, and, approaching the moat, stopped near to the drawbridge and blew his horn.

He sounded a second and a third blast, and waited. There was no one on the walls, and behind the gate he heard not the slightest sound. Presently, however, a heavy wicket, placed in the wall near the gate, was raised, and in the opening the face of a German knecht appeared.

"Wer da?" asked a rough voice.

"Jurand of Spychow!" answered the knight.

At these words the wicket was shut, and a deep silence ensued.

The time passed. No sound was heard from behind the gate; only the cawing of the crows came from the direction of the gibbet.

Jurand stood motionless for a considerable time; then he again sounded his horn.

A deep silence was his only answer.

He now understood that they kept him standing before the gate out of haughtiness, which, in the Knights of the Cross, was without bounds in the presence of the vanquished. They meant to humiliate him, as if he were a beggar. He now concluded that he would be obliged to wait until evening, or even longer. His blood began to boil, and he was seized with a desire to dismount, to lift one of the stones and hurl it at the gate. But, remembering the purpose for which he was here, he came to his senses again, and he refrained.

Meanwhile, in a crevice of the walls, something dark

appeared. Jurand distinguished men wearing fur caps, dark cowls, and even iron helms, from beneath which they looked on the knight with curious eyes. Their number increased every moment, for the terrible Jurand, waiting alone before the gate of the Krzyzaks, was no common spectacle. The heads rose higher and higher, and at length all the battlements were covered with knechts. Jurand thought that the knights, too, must be looking on him through the grating of the windows in the tower near the gate; but although he looked in that direction, he failed to see anything. Meanwhile those who had gathered on the walls began to speak. First one and then another pronounced his name, and at intervals laughter could be heard; hoarse voices shouted at him as at a wolf, louder and louder and still more boldly, and as no one reproved them, they began to throw snow at him.

The old knight moved involuntarily, and all at once the snowballs stopped, the voices became silent, and even some of the heads disappeared from the walls. For to them Jurand's name was terrible. Soon, however, even the most cowardly became reassured; they realised that they were separated from the dreadful Mazovian by a wall and a moat, and so the common soldiery began not only to throw snowballs, but ice, and even stones, which rebounded noisily from the knight's armour.

"I must humble myself for my child," Jurand repeated to himself.

He still waited. Noon passed, and the walls became empty, for the knechts had gone to dinner. Those who remained as guards ate their meal on the walls, and when they had finished they amused themselves by throwing the bones at the head of the hungry knight. They then began to jest with each other, asking which of them should go out and give him a blow on the neck with his fist or the handle of a spear. The others, on returning from their dinner, shouted that, if he were tired of waiting, he might hang himself on the gibbet, as there was one ready to his hand with a rope dangling from it. Thus, with sneers, calling of names, peals of laughter, and oaths, the afternoon passed. The short winter day was now nearing its close, but the bridge was still hanging, and the gate remained closed.

Towards evening the wind stopped blowing, the clouds disappeared from the sky, and twilight descended. The

snow became blue, then purple. The cold was not extreme, and the night promised to be clear. The men on the walls disappeared, with the exception of the guards; the crows and ravens forsook the gibbet and sought the woods. At length the sky grew dark, and everything became intensely still.

"They will not open the gate before nightfall," thought Jurand.

Suddenly, however, he heard the sound of footsteps behind him.

He turned round. Six men were coming towards him. They were armed with spears and hatchets, and in their midst was a seventh man armed with a sword.

But they had no idea of attacking him. On the contrary, the knechts immediately drove their spears and halberds into the snow, and, as the night was not yet very dark, Jurand observed that they trembled. The seventh man, who appeared to be the commander, immediately stretched forth his left arm and asked:

"Are you Jurand of Spychow?"

"I am."

"The mighty and pious Komthur von Danveld has ordered me to tell you, sir, that the gate shall not be opened until you have dismounted."

For a time Jurand remained motionless; then he dismounted from his horse, which was at once taken by one of the soldiers.

"You must also give up your arms," continued the man with the sword.

The Lord of Spychow hesitated. What if they should attack him when he was disarmed and kill him like a stag? What if they seized him and flung him into prison? Then he thought that, if such were their intention, they would have sent more men to attack him. They would be unable to pierce his armour, and he could seize the arms of some and kill every one of them before help could arrive.

"And even," said he to himself, "if they mean to pour out my blood, I have come here for nothing else!"

He first threw down his axe, then his sword, then the misericordia. They seized everything; then the man who had addressed him, having retreated several steps, stopped and began to talk insolently and in a loud voice:

"For all the wrongs you have done to the Order, you must, so the Komthur commands, put on this sackcloth, which I leave with you; you must hang the scabbard of your sword on this rope, and humbly wait until the Komthur's favour shall order the gate to be opened to you."

Jurand remained alone amid the darkness and stillness of the night. On the snow lay the penitent's sack and the rope. For a long time he stood, feeling as if something within him were breaking. He felt that he would soon be no longer the knight, Jurand of Spychow, but a miserable slave, without name or honour.

It was long, therefore, before he could bring himself to approach the penitent's sack.

"How can I do otherwise?" he exclaimed at length. "Thou, O Christ, knowest that they will slaughter my innocent child if I do not what they ask of me! Thou knowest that I would not do this even to save my life! How bitter the disgrace! How bitter! But they disgraced Thee also before Thy death! Well, in the name of the Father, the Son, and——"

He stooped down and put on the sack, which was provided with openings for the head and hands; he then hung his scabbard on the rope, and dragged himself to the gate.

It was closed, but he was now indifferent whether they opened it soon or late. The castle was silent; only the guards called each other from time to time. In the tower near the gate there was a light in one of the windows; the others were dark.

The hours passed one after another; in the sky the moon appeared and shone through the gloomy clouds. The silence was such that Jurand could hear the beating of his own heart. He was torpid and motionless, as if his soul had already fled. Only one thought remained in him—that he had ceased to be the knight, Jurand of Spychow; but as yet he could not realise what he had become. At intervals it seemed to him that through the darkness of the night death was stealing silently towards him from the bodies of the hanged men which he had seen in the morning.

He shuddered and roused himself.

"O merciful Christ!" he cried suddenly; "what is this!"

From the window of the tower by the gate came the sound of a lute, at first hardly perceptible. On his way to Szczytno, Jurand had felt sure that Danusia was not there; but the sound of a lute by night at once stirred his heart within him. It seemed to him that he knew those notes, and that the player was none other than she—his child, his darling.

He knelt down and folded his hands as if in prayer; shivering, as if in a fever, he listened.

All at once a half-childish voice began in sorrowful tones to sing:

My heart is heavy for lack of thee,
Of thee, my love! O my love!
To thee I'd fly over land and sea,
Were I but a bird, my love!

Jurand tried to speak, to pronounce the beloved name, but he was almost choked with his emotion. A sudden outburst of grief, tears, and wretchedness took possession of him; he cast himself down on the snow, and began speaking to himself as if in grateful prayer.

"O Jesus!" he cried. "It is my child! O Jesus!"

His sobs shook his gigantic body. In the tower the sad voice still sang through the unbroken stillness of the night:

I'd sit and sing in a leafy tree,
Near thee, my love! O my love!
I'd sing and ask thee to look on me,
On me, O my love! My love!

.

In the morning a fat, hairy German knecht approached, and began kicking the knight lying near the gate.

"Get up, you dog!" he shouted. "The gate is open, and the Komthur commands you to appear before him."

Jurand roused himself as if from slumber. He did not seize the knecht by the throat or crush him in his iron hands. His face was pensive and almost humble. Rising up, he followed the soldier through the gate without uttering a word.

Hardly had he passed through, when he heard behind him the clang of the chains; the drawbridge began to rise, and in the gateway the heavy iron portcullis dropped.

PART V.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

At first Jurand did not know where to go after entering the castle-yard, for the knecht who had led him through the gate left him and repaired to the stables. As Jurand approached the greater gate, it opened suddenly, and a young man, dressed as a layman, but with the tonsure of a priest, came forth.

"Are you Pan Jurand of Spychow?" he asked.

"I am," said Jurand.

"The pious Komthur has ordered me to conduct you. Follow me."

He led him through a large, vaulted entrance-hall to a staircase. Here he paused and scrutinised Jurand.

"Have you truly no weapons with you?" he asked. "I am ordered to search you."

Jurand held up both arms, so that his guide might thoroughly examine his whole figure.

"Yesterday I gave up all," he replied.

"In that case," answered the guide in an undertone, "beware of breaking out into anger, for you are at our mercy."

"But at God's mercy also!" answered Jurand.

Presently they reached the chamber on the first floor, where Jurand was himself to stand before the Starosta of Szczytno. The youth opened the door and withdrew towards the staircase. The Knight of Spychow entered, and found himself in a large gloomy hall. When his eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom, he perceived, in the background, a table, with many knights sitting round it, and, still farther off, a throng of armed grooms and soldiers, while among them the castle fool led about a tame bear by a chain.

Jurand had fought once with Danveld, and had afterwards seen him as an envoy at the Prince of Mazovia's Court; but since those events many years had passed. In spite of the darkness, however, he recognised him by his corpulent figure, and by the fact that he sat in an arm-chair at the middle of the table, his arm bound in splints. On his right sat old Siegfried von Löwe of Insburk, an implacable enemy of the Polish nation, and particularly of Jurand of Spychow. On his left sat the younger brothers, Gottfried and Rotgier. Danveld had invited them specially to witness his triumph and to enjoy the fruits of the treachery which they had plotted together and helped to execute. They were now seated at their ease, in soft robes of dark cloth, and girded with light swords, exultant and self-confident, surveying Jurand with that haughtiness and contempt which they ever exhibited towards the weak and the vanquished.

There was a long silence, for all wished to enjoy to the full the sight of the man whom they had formerly dreaded, and who now stood before them with bowed head, clothed in the sackcloth of a penitent, and with a rope, to which hung his empty scabbard, about his neck. They wished also that his humiliation should be seen by as many people as possible, for the chamber was almost filled with armed men, the side doors being open to all who cared to enter. As he looked at them, the knight recovered hope, for he reflected that, if Danveld did not mean to keep his promises, he would not have invited so many witnesses.

Presently Danveld beckoned with his hand to silence the talk, and signed to one of the grooms, who at once approached Jurand, grasped the rope about his neck, and led him a few steps nearer to the table.

"See," said Danveld, looking triumphantly upon the spectators, "see how the might of the Order doth vanquish insolence and wickedness!"

"God grant it ever!" answered the spectators.

"You have bitten the Order like a mad dog," said Danveld, addressing the prisoner; "therefore has God granted that you should now stand before us like a dog with a cord about your neck, seeking for mercy and pity."

"Do not liken me to a dog, Komthur," answered Jurand, "for by so doing you detract from the merit of those with whom I fought, and who were slain by my hand."

At these words a murmur, caused either by the boldness of the answer or by its reasonableness, arose among the armed Germans.

"Look!" exclaimed the Komthur, evidently dissatisfied with the turn taken by the discourse; "he still spits in our faces with arrogance and pride!"

But Jurand lifted up his arms as if invoking Heaven as his witness, and answered with bowed head:

"God has seen that I have left my pride behind outside your gates! God has seen it, and He shall judge whether, in humbling my knighthood, you have not disgraced yourselves. There is but one knightly honour, and it ought to be respected by every knight!"

"Do not complain that your knighthood has been humbled," said Danveld brutally, with a frown, "for were I to make you a kennel-keeper, even a kennel-keeper of the Order is better than your knighthood!"

There was great laughter, and from behind the brothers of the Order a voice exclaimed:

"You will cut reeds on the lake in summer!"

"And catch crabs with carrion!" clamoured another.

"And begin by driving away the crows from the carcasses on the gallows!" added a third. "Here you will find no lack of work."

Presently, some left the table, and, approaching the prisoner, surveyed him curiously from head to foot, exclaiming:

"So this is the Boar of Spychow, whose tusks our Komthur has knocked out! Surely he has foam at his mouth! Ah, he would gladly bite some one, but cannot!"

Danveld and the other brothers of the Order had at first desired to impart to the audience something of the solemn appearance of a trial; but now, seeing that the proceedings had turned out otherwise, they rose from the benches and mingled with those who had surrounded Jurand. Old Siegfried von Loewe did not appear satisfied, but the Komthur himself said to him:

"Smooth your brows; there will be still more sport."

They then proceeded to examine Jurand. It was, indeed, a rare opportunity, for any knight or knecht who had hitherto beheld him so closely had usually closed his eyes for ever. Presently, some began to clamour for ale to make the day still merrier, and soon the clinking of the great jugs was heard throughout the room.

"It is best so," said the Komthur, growing cheerful; "let him not think that his disgrace is an affair of importance."

Again they approached him, and, striking him beneath the chin with their jugs, cried: "Would you drink, snout of Mazovia?" and poured the ale over his hands and splashed it in his eyes.

Jurand stood among them, stunned. At length he approached old Siegfried, and, evidently feeling that he would not be able to endure more, he cried out, so loudly that the clamour in the chamber was overcome:

"By the Saviour's Passion and your soul's salvation, I adjure you to give me back my child, as you have promised!"

He sought to grasp the old Komthur's right hand, but he withdrew it hastily.

"Hands off, slave!" he cried. "What would you have?"

"I have set von Bergow free," Jurand answered, "and have come myself because you promised that you would deliver up the child who is detained here."

"Who promised you this?" asked Danveld.

"By my conscience and faith, you, Komthur!"

"You will not find any witnesses; but witnesses assuredly are of little importance when men's word and honour are in question."

"Upon your honour!" exclaimed Jurand. "Upon the Order's honour!"

"If it be so," replied Danveld, "she will be restored to you."

"All that has happened to him here," he continued, addressing those present, "is a harmless sport, quite out of proportion to his wickedness and his crimes. Yet, as we have promised to restore him his daughter if he would appear and humble himself before us, know then that, as the word of a Knight of the Cross must be as immutable as God's, we now bestow liberty upon the damsel whom we took from the robbers, and that, after he has performed an exemplary penance for sins committed against the Order, we will let him go his way also."

Many of those present were astonished at these words, for they knew Danveld's former ill-will towards Jurand, and had not expected such upright action on his part. Old Siegfried von Loewe, Rotgier, and Brother Gottfried

therefore looked at him in amazement, raising and knitting their brows. But Danveld feigned not to see their inquiring looks.

"We will send your daughter back with an escort," said he, "and you will remain here until our convoy has returned in safety, and until you have paid the ransom."

Jurand was somewhat astonished at these words, for he had already lost all hope of his sacrifice benefiting Danusia. It was, therefore, almost with gratitude that he now looked upon Danveld and replied:

"May God bless you, Komthur!"

"In this," said Danveld, "see the virtue of the Knights of Christ!"

"He is indeed the source of all compassion!" answered Jurand. "But, as I have not seen my child for a long time, allow me to look upon the maiden and give her my blessing."

"Assuredly, and in the presence of all, so that there may be witnesses that we have kept our faith and acted with clemency."

Having spoken, he ordered the nearest knecht to bring Danusia in, while he himself approached von Loewe, Rotgier, and Gottfried, with whom he began a hurried and animated conversation.

"Although you had formerly other designs," said old Siegfried, "I do not oppose."

"What!" exclaimed Rotgier, who was celebrated for his ferocity, hot-headedness, and courage, "would you let loose not only the maid, but this hell-hound also to bite again?"

"And he will bite worse than ever!" said Gottfried.

"No matter; he will pay the ransom!" answered Danveld carelessly.

Meanwhile, the others surrounded Jurand, and, being conscious of the glory which would accrue to all belonging to the Order from Danveld's honest act, they began boasting in his face.

"What now, breakbones?" said the captain of the archers. "Would your heathenish brethren deal thus uprightly with one of our Christian knights?"

Jurand, however, heeded neither the insolence nor the contempt which their words contained. His heart was full, and his eyes were wet with tears. He thought of Danusia, whom he was to see in a few moments—whom he

was to see owing to their clemency. He therefore looked upon those about him almost with contrition.

"Assuredly, assuredly!" he said. "I have been hard towards you at times, but treacherous—never!"

Just then, at the other end of the chamber, a voice suddenly called out, "The maid is coming!" and there was instant silence throughout the whole room. The soldiers drew back on both sides. Although none of them had as yet seen Jurand's daughter, and most of them did not even know of her presence in the castle, because of the secrecy with which Danveld invested all his actions, yet there were some who knew, and these now whispered to each other concerning her marvellous beauty. All eyes were fixed with extraordinary curiosity upon the door through which she was to enter. The knecht appeared first, followed by the servant of the Order who had ridden to the hunting lodge. Then came the figure of a girl dressed in white, her hair hanging loose behind, and bound over the forehead with a ribbon.

Presently the whole room resounded with a mighty peal of laughter. Jurand, who had instantly sprung forward to meet his daughter, suddenly started back and stood, pale as linen, rooted to the ground in amazement. For instead of Danusia, he saw the sharp-pointed head, the blue lips, and the vacant eyes of an idiot girl.

"This is not my daughter!" he exclaimed in a voice full of apprehension.

"Not your daughter!" echoed Danveld. "By St. Liborius of Paderborn! In that case, either it is not your daughter whom we rescued from the robbers, or she has been transformed by a sorcerer, for there is no other girl in Szczytno."

Old Siegfried, Rotgier, and Gottfried exchanged glances, full of admiration for Danveld's cunning, but none of them had time to speak, for Jurand cried out with a terrible voice:

"She is—she is in Szczytno! I heard her sing! It was Danusia's voice!"

Hereupon Danveld turned towards the assembly and said calmly but emphatically:

"I call upon all here present, and especially Siegfried von Loewe, and you, pious brothers, Rotgier and Gottfried, to witness that, according to my word and promise, I have restored this maid, whom the robbers stated to be a

daughter of Jurand of Spychow. If she is not so, it is not our fault, but rather the will of God, who has chosen such means to give Jurand over into our hands."

Siegfried and the two younger brothers nodded their heads to signify that they heard, and would bear witness in case of need. They again exchanged a hasty look, for this was more than they could have expected. Who but Danveld could have succeeded in seizing Jurand, and, while withholding his daughter, seemed to keep the promise to surrender her?

But Jurand threw himself on his knees and adjured Danveld, by all the relics of Marienburg, and by the dust and the heads of his parents, to give him back his own child, and not to act as a trickster and traitor, who breaks his oaths and promises. His voice was animated with such sincerity and despair that many present began to suspect the perpetration of some fraud, although to others it seemed that the girl's form might really have been changed by some sorcerer.

"God sees your treachery!" exclaimed Jurand. "By the Saviour's wounds, by the hour of your own death, give me back my child!"

And, rising from his bended knees, he bowed low before Danveld, but his eyes glared as if with madness, and his voice trembled alternately with pain, apprehension, despair, and menace. Danveld, hearing charges of duplicity and treachery levelled at him in the presence of all, began to snort with his nostrils, and at last anger burst out over his face like a flame. In order to thoroughly break the wretched man, he moved towards him, and, leaning forward, muttered through his clenched teeth:

"If I give her back to you, it will be along with my bastard!"

In an instant Jurand roared like a bull. With his two hands he grasped Danveld and lifted him from the ground. The chamber resounded with a piercing cry of "Spare!" and immediately the Komthur's body was dashed against the stone floor with such terrible force that the brains from the shattered skull bespattered Siegfried and Rotgier, who stood nearest.

Jurand sprang towards the wall where the weapons stood, and, seizing a great two-handed sword, fell like a thunderbolt upon the Germans, now petrified with terror.

Although accustomed to the carnage of battles, their hearts quailed, and they shrank back and ran away like a herd of sheep flying before a wolf. The chamber rang with their cries of terror, with the stamping of human feet, the jingle of upset vessels, the howls of the grooms, the roaring of the bear, which had broken away from the fool and had climbed to a lofty window, and with desperate calls for armour, shields, swords, and crossbows. At length there was the flash of arms, and several scores of sharp blades were directed against Jurand; but, reckless of everything, and half mad with wrath, he rushed against them. A struggle of unexampled ferocity now ensued, resembling a butchery rather than an armed combat.

The young and vehement Brother Gottfried attacked Jurand first, but with one stroke of his sword the knight hewed off his head and one of his arms. The next to fall by Jurand's hand were the captain of the archers, von Hecht, the steward of the castle, and the Englishman Hughes, who, although he did not clearly understand the matter, pitied Jurand, and drew his sword only after Danveld was slain. The others, seeing the formidable strength and the ferocity of the man, crowded together against him in order to make a stand. But this only brought them greater disaster; for Jurand, with infuriated eyes and hair erect upon his head, his whole body bespattered with blood, cut and severed and broke the throng with his terrible sword play, laying them low like a storm overturning bushes and trees. All were again seized with terror, for it seemed that the dreaded Mazovian alone would put to the sword and slay every one of them.

"Disperse yourselves!" shouted old Siegfried von Löwe. "Surround him! Strike him from behind!"

They therefore scattered themselves like a flight of starlings on which a hawk has swooped down. But they were unable to surround him, for, instead of seeking some point favourable for defence, he began to chase them round the walls, and everyone whom he overtook fell dead as if struck by lightning. Humiliation, despair, and disappointed hope were transformed in his heart into a thirst for blood, which seemed to multiply his natural strength tenfold. The sword, for which the strongest among the Knights of the Cross required both hands, he wielded like a feather with but one. He sought neither life, nor

safety, nor victory, but only revenge. So, like a consuming fire, or a river which, having burst the dam, blindly destroys everything that lies in its path, he blindly annihilated human lives.

They could not strike him from behind, for, at the outset they could not overtake him, and afterwards the common soldiery were afraid to approach him even from behind, for they well knew that, if he were but to turn round, no human power could save them from death. Many of the others were completely terror-stricken, for they imagined that such devastation could be wrought by no ordinary mortal, but that they had to do with a man aided by superhuman powers.

Old Siegfried von Löwe and Brother Rotgier climbed to the gallery which ran along above the large windows of the hall, and began to call upon the others to follow their example and save themselves. This they were in such haste to do that they jostled one another roughly on the narrow staircase in order to reach the gallery as quickly as possible, and thence hurl missiles at the knight, against whom all open fight seemed to be in vain. At length the last man banged the door leading to the staircase, and Jurand was left alone below. A clamour of joy and triumph arose from the gallery, and immediately a shower of heavy oak stools and benches and iron torch-holders began to descend upon the knight. One of these missiles struck him on the forehead and bespattered his face with blood. At this moment the great entrance-door opened, and a number of soldiers, summoned through the upper windows, rushed in a body into the chamber, armed with spears, halberds, axes, crossbows, stakes, poles, ropes, and other arms, such as they had been able to seize hastily.

With his left hand Jurand, still mad with rage, wiped the blood off his face lest it should dim his sight, gathered his strength together afresh, and fell upon the whole throng. And again the chamber resounded with groans, the clash of steel, the gnashing of teeth, and the shrieks of dying men.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THAT evening, behind the table in the same chamber, sat Siegfried von Loewe, who had temporarily assumed command of Szczytno in the place of Danveld. Beside him sat Brother Rotgier, the Knight von Bergow, formerly Jurand's prisoner, and two noble youths, novices who were soon to wear the white mantle. The winter wind howled behind the windows, causing the glass to tremble in its leaden fastenings, and the flames of the torches burning in their iron collars to flare, while at intervals it sent great clouds of smoke into the chamber from the chimney. There was a long silence, during which Siegfried, whose soul was filled with gloomy thoughts, leaned his elbows on the table, his grey head leaning forward and supported by his hands, and his face in the shadow.

"What are we to discuss?" asked Brother Rotgier at length.

Siegfried raised his head, glanced at the speaker, and said, as if rousing himself from meditation:

"There is still the smell of blood here."

"No, Komthur," answered Rotgier; "I had the floor washed and the room fumigated with brimstone."

Siegfried cast a curious glance at those present.

"God have mercy on the souls of Brother Danveld and Brother Gottfried!" said he.

They understood that the mention of brimstone had reminded him of hell, and that this was why he implored God's mercy on their behalf. A cold shudder ran through them, and they hastily replied:

"Amen! Amen! Amen!"

And again the howling of the wind and the trembling of the window panes were heard.

"Where are the bodies of the Komthur and Brother Gottfried?" asked the old man.

"In the chapel. The priests are singing litanies over them."

"Have they yet been coffined?"

"Yes; but the Komthur's head has been covered over, for his skull and face were both shattered in pieces."

"Where are the other bodies, and the wounded?"

"The bodies have been laid on the snow, that they may grow stiff before the coffins are ready; the wounded are already in the hospital, and their wounds have been dressed."

Siegfried again rested his head in his hands.

"Which of you saw Jurand?" he asked.

"I saw him," answered von Bergow.

"Is he alive?"

"He is. He lies in the same net in which we entangled him. When he came to himself the soldiers wished to dispatch him, but the chaplain would not permit it."

"We must not kill him!" exclaimed Siegfried. "He is a great man among his countrymen; a terrible outcry would arise. Nor can we conceal what has happened, for there were too many witnesses."

"What is to be done, and what are we to say?" asked Rotgier.

Siegfried pondered for a time, and then said:

"You, noble Count von Bergow, will go to the Grand Master at Marienburg. You have groaned in bondage under Jurand, and you are a guest of the Order. As a guest, who is under no necessity to speak in favour of its members, you will be the more readily believed. Tell, then, what you have seen—how Danveld, after having rescued a girl from the robbers on the frontier, had reason to believe that she was Jurand's child, and therefore informed Jurand, who accordingly came to Szczytno, and—what happened further you yourself know."

"Pardon me, pious Komthur," said von Bergow. "I have endured severe bondage in Spychow, and, as your guest, I would gladly bear witness always in your favour; but, for the peace of my conscience, tell me whether Jurand's daughter was not really in Szczytno, and whether it was not Danveld's treachery that was the cause of her terrible father's fit of madness."

Siegfried von Loewe hesitated before answering. His nature was imbued with a deep hatred towards the Polish nation. He was cruel—in this surpassing even Danveld; he was rapacious when the matter concerned the Order; but he was not mendacious. It was, indeed, the chief

bitterness and affliction of his life that, owing to licentiousness, profligacy, and insubordination, the affairs of the Order had lately taken such a course that lying had become essential to its very existence. Von Bergow's question, therefore, troubled his soul, and it was only after a long interval of silence that he answered:

"Danveld now stands before God, and God will judge him! But you, Count, if you are asked concerning your own thoughts, then say what you will. And if you are asked concerning what you saw with your own eyes, then say that, before we entangled the madman in the net, you saw nine bodies—besides the wounded—lying on this floor, and among them the bodies of Danveld, Brother Gottfried, von Hecht, Hughes, and two other noble youths. God grant them eternal rest! Amen!"

"Amen! Amen!" repeated the novices.

"And say also," added Siegfried, "that, although Danveld desired to subdue this enemy of the Order, yet none of us unsheathed a sword until Jurand had first attacked us."

"I will tell only what my eyes beheld," replied von Bergow.

"Then come before midnight into the chapel, whither we also will come to pray for the souls of the departed," said Siegfried. And he stretched out his hand to him as a sign at once of thanks and of leave-taking, for in his further deliberations he desired to be left alone with Brother Rotgier, whom he loved and trusted much. After von Bergow's departure, therefore, he also dismissed the two novices, under the pretext that he wished them to oversee the making of the coffins for the common soldiers who had been killed by Jurand.

"Listen to what I have to say to you," he said to Rotgier hastily, as soon as the door had closed behind them. "There is only one way by which no living soul may ever learn that Jurand's daughter was with us."

"About that there will be no difficulty," answered Rotgier, "for no one besides Danveld, Gottfried, ourselves, and the servant of the Order who attends her, has known that she is here. The men who brought her from the forest lodge were made drunk, and, by Danveld's order, hanged. Among the soldiers there were some who suspected something, but they have been led astray by the appearance of the idiot, so that they do not themselves

know whether we were the victims of a mistake or whether Jurand's daughter was actually transformed by some sorcerer."

"That is well," said Siegfried.

"Yet I have thought, noble Komthur," Rotgier continued, "seeing that Danveld is dead, that we might, perhaps, cast the whole blame upon him——"

"And confess to the whole world that, in time of peace, and during negotiations with the Prince of Mazovia, we abducted from his Court a ward of the Princess, the most beloved of her ladies! No, by Heaven! That is impossible. We were seen along with Danveld at the Court, and his relative, the Grand Master, knows that we were always his coadjutors in all matters. If we accuse Danveld, therefore, he will avenge his memory."

"We must consider the affair carefully," said Rotgier.

"Yes, we must find some good expedient, otherwise woe to us! Were we to restore Jurand's daughter, then she herself would declare that we did not rescue her from the robbers, but that she was seized by men who led her straight to Szczytno."

"It would be so."

"So help me, God! I am concerned, not with our own personal responsibility alone. The Prince will complain to the Polish King, and their envoys will not fail to clamour at every Court against our outrages, our treachery, and our crimes. God alone knows the hurt to the Order that may ensue. The Master himself, if he knew the truth, would order that the maid be concealed."

"But if she were lost, would not they accuse us just the same?" asked Rotgier.

"No. Brother Danveld was a wily man. Do you not remember that he stipulated that Jurand must not only appear in Szczytno, but must previously write to the Prince saying that he was going to ransom his daughter from the robbers, and that he knew she was not with us?"

"True; but, in that case, how shall we justify what has happened here?"

"We shall say that, knowing Jurand was seeking his daughter, and having rescued from the robbers a maid who would not tell her name, we informed him, thinking that she might be his child; then that he came to us, but, on beholding the girl, lost his reason and, possessed by

the evil spirit, shed more innocent blood than many a battle costs."

There was an interval of silence, then Rotgier asked :

"What, then, shall we do with Jurand's daughter?"

"That we must consider."

"Give her to me."

"No," said Siegfried. "Listen, my young brother! When a matter concerns the Order, never scheme either with man or woman, and never scheme for your own profit. Danveld was smitten by the Lord's hand because he not only wished to avenge the Order's injuries, but also to satisfy his own lusts."

"You do me injustice," exclaimed Rotgier.

"Do not scheme for your own profit," repeated Siegfried, "for your body and soul will become effeminate, and the knee of that sturdy race will one day press upon your breast so that you will never rise again."

For the third time he leaned his head gloomily on his hand, but he was evidently communing only with his own conscience and thinking only of himself, for after a while he said :

"Upon me also there lies a burden of much human blood, of many sorrows, of many tears. I also, when the matter concerned the Order, and I saw that force alone would not suffice, did not hesitate to seek out other ways. But when I appear before God I will say: 'That I did for the Order's sake.' As for myself—see what I have chosen!"

And as he spoke he drew slightly aside the dark robe of the Order at his breast and disclosed a hair shirt. He grasped his temples with his hands, and, raising his head, exclaimed :

"Have done with profligacy and voluptuousness! Harden your bodies and your hearts, for I see in the air the white feathers and the claws of eagles, and they are red with the blood of Knights of the Cross!"

Both were silent for a time.

"What will you do with Jurand's daughter?" Rotgier again asked. "Will you have her taken from here to Insburk?"

"I will have her taken to Insburk and dealt with as the welfare of the Order demands."

"And I? What shall I do?"

"Have you courage within your heart?"

"What have I done to make you doubt it?"

"I do not doubt it, for I know you, and because of your courage love you as my son. Go, then, to the Court of the Prince of Mazovia and tell him of all that has happened here, as we have arranged between ourselves."

"Am I, then, to run the risk of certain destruction?"

"If your destruction tend to the glory of the Cross and of the Order, then you ought to do so. But no! No destruction awaits you. They will not injure a guest, unless, indeed, some one desires to challenge you, as that young knight did. But whether it be he or another, that is not very terrible."

"God grant it be so! Still they may seize me and cast me into a dungeon."

"They will not. Remember Jurand's letter to the Prince; and remember, besides, that you go to complain of Jurand. You will faithfully relate all he has done in Szczytno, and they must believe you. They will desist from complaining. They will, of course, make search for Jurand's daughter; but, as he himself has written that she is not with us, suspicion cannot fall upon us. We must brazen it out, and shut up their jaws, for they must think that, if we were guilty, none of us would dare to approach the Prince."

"It is true! As soon as Danveld is buried, I will set out."

"God bless you, my son! When we have done all that is needful, they will not merely refrain from detaining you, but they will be obliged to disavow Jurand, lest we should say, 'See how they deal with us!'"

"But we must complain at all other Courts besides."

"The Grand Master will see to the welfare of the Order, the more so as he is a relative of Danveld."

"Well, but if this devil of Spychow remains alive and regains his freedom——"

Siegfried's face darkened, and he answered slowly and with emphasis:

"Even if he should regain his freedom, he will never utter a word of complaint against the Order."

And he proceeded to instruct Rotgier still further as to what he should say and demand at the Court of Mazovia.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE news of the occurrence in Szczytno reached Warsaw before the arrival of Brother Rotgier, and caused much astonishment and excitement. But neither the Prince himself nor any of his Court could understand what had really happened. Some time before, as Mikolaj of Dlugolas was about to carry a letter to Marienburg, wherein the Prince complained bitterly of the seizure of Danusia by certain dissolute Komthurs on the frontier, and almost menacingly demanded her immediate release, a letter had arrived from the Lord of Spychow himself stating that his daughter had been seized by common border robbers, and that she would be speedily ransomed.

When the news arrived, it was exaggerated tenfold as it passed from mouth to mouth. People told each other that soldiers would have to be sent to the frontier in consequence of these events, and that a great war would inevitably ensue. The Prince, however, knew of what consequence it would be for the Grand Master, in the event of a war with the King of Poland, that the forces of both the Mazovian principalities should remain neutral, and he did not credit these rumours.

But although the Prince did not fear a war, he was anxious to know the truth about the rumours that came from the borderland. Although he disliked the Knights of the Cross, he was, nevertheless, glad when one evening the captain of the archers informed him that a knight of the Order had arrived and was asking an audience.

The Prince received him haughtily, although he recognised him as one of the brothers who had been present in the forest lodge. He feigned not to remember him, but asked who he was, whence he came, and what was the cause of his visit to Warsaw.

"I am Brother Rotgier," answered the Knight; "and a short time ago I had the honour of bowing before your Highness."

"Why, then, being a brother, do not you wear the symbols of the Order?"

The Knight proceeded to explain that he did not wear the white mantle because, if he did, he would inevitably be seized or killed by the Mazovian knights. In all kingdoms and principalities throughout the world, he declared, the sign of the cross upon a mantle protected its wearer and won sympathy and hospitality from the people, but in the Mazovian principality alone the cross exposed the man who wore it to certain destruction.

Here the Prince interrupted him angrily.

"Not the cross!" he exclaimed, "for we too kiss the cross, but your own wickedness! And if you meet with a better reception elsewhere it is merely because they know you less."

Seeing that the Knight was much perplexed by these words, he asked:

"You were in Szczytno; you know, then, what has happened there?"

"I was in Szczytno, and I know what has happened," answered Rotgier. "But I do not come here as the envoy of anyone, but only because the wise and pious Komthur of Insburk said to me, 'Our Master loves the pious Prince, and has faith in his justice. Therefore, while I hasten to Marienburg, do you go to Mazovia, and tell of our injuries, our disgrace, and our distress. Assuredly, that just lord will not countenance the atrocious peace-breaker and assaulter who has shed so much Christian blood, as if he were a servant not of Christ but of the devil.'"

Hereupon he began to recount all that had occurred at Szczytno: how Jurand, summoned by the Knights themselves that he might see whether the girl rescued by them from the robbers was his daughter, instead of repaying them with gratitude, had turned mad; how he had slain Danveld, Brother Gottfried, Hughes the Englishman, von Hecht, and two noble youths, not to count the common soldiers; how they, mindful of God's commandments, and not wishing to kill him, had been compelled at last to entangle the terrible man in a net, whereupon Jurand had turned his weapon against himself and wounded himself severely; and finally, how there were those—not in the castle alone, but in the town also—who, during the storm in the night after the combat, had heard fearful laughter

and voices clamouring in the air, saying, "Jurand is ours! Insulter of the Cross! Shedder of innocent blood! Jurand is ours!"

This whole tale, and especially the closing words of the Knight, made a deep impression upon all present. In truth, they were seized with fear lest Jurand might really have invoked the help of the powers of evil, and a gloomy silence ensued. The Princess, however, addressed an unexpected question to Rotgier.

"You say, Sir Knight," she said, "that, after rescuing the idiot girl from the robbers, you believed her to be Jurand's daughter, and that you therefore summoned him to Szczytno?"

"Yes, gracious lady," answered Rotgier.

"How could you believe this, seeing that you had seen Jurand's daughter herself by my side at the forest lodge?"

Brother Rotgier grew confused, for he was not prepared for such a question. The Prince rose and fixed a stern look upon the Knight, while Mikolaj of Dlugolas, Mrokota of Mocarzew, Jasko of Jagielnica, and other Mazovian knights instantly sprang towards him, and demanded, in tones of menace:

"How then could you believe it? Speak up, German! How was it possible?"

Rotgier, however, had now recovered himself.

"We monks," said he, "do not cast our eyes upon women. In the forest lodge there were many ladies by your Highness's side, but which of them was Jurand's daughter none of us knew."

"Danveld did know," said Mikolaj of Dlugolas.

"Yes, indeed," said another; "he even spoke with her during the hunt."

"Danveld now stands before God," answered Rotgier; "but I will only say this of him, that, on the morning after his death, full-blown roses were found upon his coffin, and this being winter time, no human hand could have placed them there."

Silence again ensued.

"How did you learn of the seizure of Jurand's daughter?" asked the Prince.

"The audacity and wickedness of the deed brought the report of it to our ears, even as to yours here. We ordered a thanksgiving mass because it was merely a lady

of the Court, and not one of the children born of your Highnesses who had been seized."

"Yet to me it seems strange that you should think the idiot girl Jurand's daughter."

"Danveld spoke thus: 'The devil often betrays his servants, so perhaps he has transformed Jurand's daughter.'"

"But the robbers, being common people, could not have forged Kaleb's writing and Jurand's seal. Who, then, could have done it?"

"The evil spirit!"

And no one was able to find any answer.

"These questions," said Rotgier, after a pause, looking fixedly into the Prince's eyes, "are like sword-blades in my bosom, for they breathe distrust and suspicion. But, having faith in God's justice and the power of truth, I ask your Highness whether Jurand himself suspected us of this deed. If so, why, before being summoned by us to Szczytno, did he search throughout the whole borderland after the robbers in order to ransom his daughter from them?"

"Indeed, that is true!" said the Prince. "He did suspect you at first, but afterwards—afterwards he thought differently."

"Thus does truth's brightness overcome the darkness!" exclaimed Rotgier.

He looked triumphantly round the chamber, with the thought that, as the heads of the Knights of the Cross were more clever and cunning than those of the Poles, their nation must always be booty and food for the Order, as flies are booty and food for the spider. Abandoning his former tone of deference, he approached the Prince, and addressed him in a loud and importunate voice.

"Make amends, lord," he cried, "for our losses, our injuries, our tears, and our blood! That hell-hound is your subject; therefore, for God's sake, from whom the power of kings and princes flows, and for the sake of justice and the cross, we ask compensation for our injuries and our blood!"

The Prince looked at Rotgier in amazement.

"By Heaven!" he said, "what would you have? If Jurand has shed your blood in madness, am I answerable for his madness?"

"He was your subject, lord," answered the Knight.

"His lands, his villages, and his castle, where he held in bondage the servants of the Order, lie in your principality. These, at least, therefore, may surely now become the property of the Order. That will be no compensation, forsooth, for the noble blood shed by him, nor will it bring the dead to life; but it may partly appease the anger of God, and wipe out the shame which will otherwise fall upon this principality."

On hearing these words, the Prince was still more astonished, and it was only after a long silence that he answered:

"By God's wounds! If this your Order resides here, to whose favour do you owe it if not to that of my ancestors? Have not you enough lands and towns and provinces which formerly belonged to us and our nation? Jurand's daughter is yet alive, for no one has informed you of her death, and yet you are already desirous of seizing the orphan's dowry and compensating your injuries with the orphan's bread!"

At this moment the voice of old Mikolaj of Dlugolas was unexpectedly heard.

"People accuse you of cupidity," he said, "and God knows whether they do so unjustly. But in this matter you assuredly care more for the profit than for the Order's honour."

"That is true!" exclaimed all the Mazovian knights together.

Rotgier advanced a few steps, raised his head, and, measuring them with a haughty look, answered:

"I do not come here as an envoy, but as a witness of the matter, and as a knight ready to defend the Order's honour with his own blood until the last breath! Whosoever, then, will dare, contrary to Jurand's own words, to suspect the Order of complicity in the seizure of his daughter, let him pick up this knightly gage and entrust himself to God's judgment."

As he spoke, he threw his gauntlet on the floor before them. But all stood by in gloomy silence, for, although many would gladly have notched their swords upon the Knight's neck, they were, nevertheless, afraid of the judgment of God. The Knight, therefore, grew still more insolent, and, setting his arms akimbo, demanded:

"Is there any one here who will pick up the gauntlet?"

Suddenly a knight, whose entrance no one had observed,

and who had stood for some time by the door listening to the conversation, advanced to the middle of the chamber, picked up the gauntlet, and said:

"I will!"

And as he spoke, he threw his own gauntlet straight in Rotgier's face.

"In the presence of God, of the Prince, and of all honourable knights of this land," he said, in a voice which sounded like thunder in the silence which followed, "I tell you, Knight of the Cross, that you bark like a dog against justice and truth; and I challenge you to the fight, on foot or on horseback, with lances or axes, short swords or long, not to captivity, but to the death!"

In the chamber one might have heard the beat of a fly's wing. The Knight of the Cross was no less astonished than the rest of those present. Confusion, pallor, and angry passion flitted across his face as the lightning flashes across the midnight sky. He seized the gauntlet which had glided from his face and caught on one of the pricks of his shoulder-belt.

"Who are you, who challenge God's justice?" he demanded.

The challenger undid the buckle beneath his chin, removed his helmet, and disclosed a fair young head.

"I am Zbyszko of Bogdaniec," he answered; "the husband of Jurand's daughter."

All were surprised, Rotgier with the rest, for none, with the exception of the Prince, the Princess, Father Wyszoniek, and de Lorche, knew of the wedding of Danusia, and the Knights of the Cross had felt assured that Jurand's daughter possessed no natural protector except her father. At the same moment, de Lorche advanced and said:

"I attest the truth of his words upon my honour as a knight. Whosoever dares to doubt it—there, he has my gauntlet!"

On hearing this, the Knight of the Cross bowed his head, and, turning to Zbyszko, said:

"If you are willing, then let it be on foot, with axes, in a closed arena."

"God grant that victory be with the right!" exclaimed the Mazovian knights.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE whole Court was uneasy regarding Zbyszko, for, in view of Jurand's letter, no one doubted that the Knight of the Cross had right on his side.

Some regretted that they had not themselves picked up the gauntlet, declaring that, but for Jurand's letter, they would unquestionably have done so.

There were those, however, who had hopes of Zbyszko.

"He is, indeed, a sturdy fellow also," said they. "We have heard how he has already broken German heads upon the levelled ground. His groom, too, can fight."

"These fellows," said others, "will assuredly not hobble over the field, and provided only truth and God be on their side, those bastard Teutons will not escape with whole bones."

Rotgier, however, succeeded in throwing sand in all eyes, so that many were tormented with uncertainty as to which was the side of right, and the Prince himself was much troubled concerning this. On the evening before the battle, therefore, he summoned Zbyszko before himself and the Princess.

"Are you assured," he asked, "that God will be with you? From whom do you know that they have seized Danusia? Did Jurand tell you anything? For look—here is Jurand's letter; the seal is his, and the writing is the writing of Kaleb the priest. In this letter Jurand says he knows the deed was not done by the Knights of the Cross. What did he tell you?"

"He said it was not done by the Knights."

"How then do you dare hazard your life by submitting yourself to God's judgment?"

Zbyszko was silent, but for a time his lips trembled and tears gathered in his eyes.

"I know nothing, your Highness," he answered. "We left here together, and on the way I confessed to Jurand

about the wedding. He began to lament, thinking it might be an offence to God, but when I told him that it seemed to be God's will he grew calmer. During the whole journey he repeated that no one except the Knights of the Cross had seized Danusia. But what happened afterwards I myself do not know. The same woman who brought medicine for me to the forest-house came to Spychow, and along with her another messenger. They were closeted together, but what they said I do not know either. But after their deliberations Jurand's own servants could not recognise him, for he was as pale as death. To us he said, 'This was not done by the Knights of the Cross.' He set free von Bergow and all the other prisoners then in the dungeon—God knows for what reason—and departed alone without either a groom or a servant. He said he was going to the robbers to ransom Danusia, and ordered me to wait. I therefore waited. Presently there came a rumour from Szczytno that Jurand had destroyed many of the Germans, and had himself fallen dead. Your Highness, the ground of Spychow grew too hot for my feet, and I nearly went mad. I ordered the men to horse, to avenge Jurand's death, but Kaleb the priest said, 'You will not be able to take the castle, therefore do not begin the war. Go to the Prince's Court; perhaps they know something there concerning Danusia.' I came here, therefore, and arrived as yonder dog was barking about the Order's injuries and Jurand's madness. I picked up his gauntlet, as I had challenged him before, for, although I know nothing of this matter, one thing I know—they are infernal liars, without either shame, or honour, or faith! See, your Highness, they stabbed de Fourcy to death, and tried to cast the guilt upon my groom. By Heaven! they stabbed him to death like an ox, and then came to you, my lord, to demand compensation and revenge! Who then will swear that they did not lie first of all to Jurand and then to your Highness? I do not know where Danusia is, but I challenged Rotgier because I prefer death to life without my love."

Having spoken, he tore the network cap from his head, so that his hair fell about his shoulders. He sobbed bitterly and tore his hair in his grief. Princess Anna Daunta, herself afflicted by the loss of Danusia and moved by Zbyszko's grief, laid her hands on his head and said:

"May God help, comfort, and bless you!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ALTHOUGH the Prince was unable to oppose the combat, he prevailed upon Rotgier to write to the Grand Master and to Siegfried von Loewe declaring that it was he who had first thrown down his gauntlet before the Mazovian knights, and had, in consequence, exposed himself to a combat with the husband of Jurand's daughter, who, moreover, had challenged him previously. The Knight of the Cross further justified his fighting without authority, urging that the matter concerned the honour of the Order.

Meanwhile, the snow in the castle-yard was trampled level and strewn with ashes, so that the feet of the fighters should not slip on the smooth surface. Throughout the castle an extraordinary stir prevailed. All hearts were on the side of Zbyszko, and the apprehension excited by the tales of his adversary's fame and skill was therefore all the greater. Many of the ladies passed the night in the chapel, where, after having made confession to Father Wyszoniek, Zbyszko also prayed.

When day had completely broken, the Prince and Princess, with their children, appeared in the courtyard, which was surrounded by a portico, and took their places in the middle, between the pillars, at a point from which they could have a perfect view of the whole yard. The chief courtiers, ladies, and knights occupied seats beside them. All parts of the portico were filled.

The day was cold and moist, but bright. The air swarmed with daws, which, scared by the unusual stir, swept over the castle in a circle with a great flapping of wings. In spite of the cold, the spectators were hot with excitement, and when the first trumpet sounded, announcing the entrance of the combatants, all hearts beat violently. They entered from opposite sides of the arena.

The Knight of the Cross wore a blue enamelled cuirass, and a like cuish and helm: his visor was raised, and he

bore a plume of peacock feathers at his crest. Zbyszko's breast, sides, and back were encased in the magnificent Milanese coat of mail which he had captured from the Frisians. On his head he wore a helm with an open visor and without any plume, and his feet were encased in shoes of ox-hide. Each carried on his left arm a target bearing a coat of arms: that of the Knight of the Cross representing three lions rampant beneath chequers, and that of Zbyszko a blunt horse-shoe. In their right hand both carried formidable broad axes with oaken helms longer than a tall man's arm. They were accompanied by their grooms, Hlawa and von Krist, both of whom wore dark armour, and also bore a target and an axe, but the head of the latter was formed of a short sword inserted in the axe's eye.

For the second time the trumpet sounded; at the third blast the combatants were to attack. Only a small space strewn with grey ashes now divided them, and above it death seemed to hover like an ill-omened bird. Before the third blast was given, Rotgier approached the pillars between which the Prince and Princess were seated, and said, in a loud voice which was heard in every corner of the portico:

"August lord, I call God, your Highness, and all knights of this land to witness that I am guiltless of the blood which will here be shed!"

All hearts were again oppressed at these words. But Zbyszko merely turned to his Bohemian servant, and said:

"This Teuton arrogance stinks in my nostrils! After my death it would not be amiss, but while I am alive it is unseemly. This braggart wears a peacock tuft on his helm, and I have vowed to capture three such plumes—nay, as many as I have fingers on my hands. God grant the occasion!"

The trumpet now sounded for the third time. On hearing it, the grooms sprang towards each other quickly and furiously, while the knights approached each other more slowly and deliberately, as their dignity required. Few of the spectators observed the grooms, but those who did at once perceived the terrible ascendancy that lay on Hlawa's side. The Bohemian attacked so furiously that von Krist was obliged to retreat almost from the outset. The braggart, who had hitherto fought only when he could not do otherwise, now recognised that his audacious

and reckless words had brought him face to face with a formidable athlete whom he ought to have avoided like perdition. At length he began to grow tired beneath his antagonist's blows, but the Bohemian struck at him still more swiftly and powerfully. Like chips from a pine-tree beneath a peasant's axe, the plates of the German groom's armour began to yield and fly under the blows of Hlawka. The upper edge of the German's target was bent and shivered, and his armlet, with its leather strap, which was already cut and bespattered with blood, fell to the ground. Von Krist's hair stood upright with terror. Once and again he struck with his whole strength at his enemy's buckler; then, seeing that there was no hope for him except by some extraordinary exertion, he suddenly threw himself with all the weight of his armour and body beneath Hlawka's legs. Both fell to the ground and wrestled, rolling and tossing each other on the snow. The Bohemian soon got uppermost, and presently his knee pressed against the iron network shirt covering the German's body. From behind his girdle he drew a short three-edged sword.

"Spare!" panted von Krist in a low voice, raising his eyes to the Bohemian's.

But, instead of answering, Hlawka stretched over von Krist's body in order to reach his neck, and having severed the strap of the helm beneath the chin, struck the wretch twice in the throat, directing the edge of the weapon towards the lower part of the throat and the breast.

Von Krist's eyes seemed to vanish in the depths of his skull, and his hands and feet began to strike the snow, as if to beat the ashes from off it. But soon he lay stiff and motionless, his lips covered with red foam and his wounds bleeding abundantly.

Then the Bohemian rose up, wiped his sword with the German's clothes, picked up his axe, and, leaning on the helve, began to follow the sterner and more stubborn fight waged between his master and Brother Rotgier.

The western knights were accustomed to comfort and luxury, while those of Little Poland, Great Poland, and Mazovia led hard, severe lives, which aroused admiration among strangers. It seemed that Zbyszko had an advantage over the Knight of the Cross in regard to strength of limb, just as his servant had over von Krist. On the

other hand, being a young man, he was inferior to Rotgier in knightly training. It was also in some measure a favourable circumstance for Zbyszko that the fight was to be with axes, for with such a weapon fencing was impossible. With short or long swords, the German would have had considerable advantage. Zbyszko, however, as well as the spectators, recognised by Rotgier's movements and his manner of wielding the target, that he was an experienced and formidable antagonist, and that it was not the first time he had engaged in such a combat. At every blow delivered by Zbyszko, Rotgier lowered his target and slightly withdrew it, so that even the strongest blow was unable either to pierce or shatter the smooth surface. Sometimes he fell back, sometimes he pressed forward, but always so quickly and so quietly withal that the eye could scarcely follow his movements.

The Prince grew anxious about Zbyszko, and the men's faces became gloomy, for it seemed to them that the German was purposely trifling with his opponent. Sometimes Rotgier did not even lower his target, but instead, at the moment of the stroke, turned aside, so that the blade of the axe merely cut the air. This was dangerous, for Zbyszko might have lost his balance, in which case his death would have been inevitable. Seeing this, the Bohemian, who stood over the body of von Krist, also grew alarmed.

"So help me, Heaven!" he said within himself, "if the master falls, I will strike the German with the back of my axe between the shoulders, and he shall fall also!"

But, thanks to the extraordinary strength of his limbs, Zbyszko did not fall. By planting his feet far apart he was able to maintain his balance after each blow. Rotgier speedily observed this, and the on-lookers were mistaken in supposing that he esteemed his adversary lightly. On the contrary, when, in spite of all his skill with the target, his hand grew stiff beneath it, he knew that he would have great trouble with the youth, and that unless he could bring him to the ground by means of some feint, the fight would be long and dangerous. When he saw Zbyszko's glaring eyes and close-drawn lips and nostrils, he said to himself that he would soon be blinded and distracted by his fury, that his coolness would forsake him, and that he would think more of delivering blows than of defending himself. But in this he was mistaken.

Zbyszko did not attempt to preserve himself from blows by swerving aside, but he did not forget to use his target, and while raising his axe he did not expose himself more than was necessary. Evidently he was alive to the skill and experience of his opponent, for his blows betokened a certain deliberate resolution which was the outcome, not of hot-headedness, but of cold and calculating rancour.

In spite of his strength, Rotgier soon saw that he was not equal to Zbyszko in that respect, and that if he should exhaust his forces before he was able to strike a decisive blow, the issue might even be fatal to him. He resolved, therefore, to fight with as little expenditure of effort as possible; he drew his target closer to his body, neither advancing nor retiring excessively; he moderated his movements, and, concentrating his whole strength of heart and arm for one decisive blow, awaited the propitious moment. The terrible combat lasted beyond the usual measure. In the portico a dead silence prevailed. Nothing was heard but the impact of the axes on the targets, sometimes sharp and sometimes hollow.

The pale winter morning brightened, the grey veil of mist cleared away, and the rising sun glinted upon the blue cuirass of the Knight of the Cross and the silver-white armour of Zbyszko. The chapel bell rang for tierce, and at the sound flights of rooks started up from the castle roof, beating their wings and cawing tumultuously, as if with joy at the sight of blood, and of the corpse which already lay motionless on the snow.

As he fought, Rotgier suddenly felt a sensation of extreme loneliness. All the eyes which looked upon him were the eyes of enemies. All the prayers, all the good wishes, all the silent vows made by the women were on Zbyszko's side. Moreover, although he was certain that his antagonist's servant would not rush upon him treacherously from behind, still the presence and proximity of this threatening figure penetrated him with involuntary disquiet. He was the more unable to resist the feeling, as the Bohemian, in order to watch the course of the fight, moved and changed his place near the combatants.

Fatigue at length began to seize the Knight of the Cross. Twice consecutively did he strike a sharp, terrible blow at Zbyszko's right shoulder, but Zbyszko repelled it so powerfully with his target that the axe reeled in Rotgier's hand, and he himself was compelled to recoil

suddenly lest he should be struck down. From that moment he shrank back constantly. His patience and coolness, as well as his physical strength, showed signs of exhaustion. Sounds, as if of triumph, burst from the spectators, and aroused in him anger and despair.

"Strike! Hit him! God's judgment! God's punishment! Heaven help you!" came every moment from both men and women.

The Prince motioned with his hand repeatedly in order to silence them, but they were not to be restrained. The clamour grew louder and louder, and presently on every side of the Princess the voices of her maids could be heard crying:

"Zbyszko! For Danusia! For Danusia!"

Zbyszko knew that the fight concerned Danusia. He was certain that this Knight of the Cross had been implicated in her capture, and in fighting against him he felt that he was fighting to redress her wrongs. Still, being young and eager, he had thought only of the fight itself during the combat. Suddenly, these cries reminded him of her loss, and of his own affliction. His heart seemed to cry out with the newly awakened pain, and he was seized with a veritable madness for revenge. The Knight of the Cross could no longer either ward off or return his terrible blows, which fell like a storm. Suddenly Zbyszko struck his target upon Rotgier's target with such superhuman force that the Knight's arm instantly grew stiff and fell powerless by his side. The Knight shrank back with alarm and terror, but as he did so Zbyszko's axe flashed before his eyes and its sharp edge descended like lightning on his right shoulder. The ears of the spectators were assailed by a piercing cry of "Jesus!" Rotgier retreated yet another step and fell to the ground on his back.

From the portico was heard the thunder of many feet, and presently the ground swarmed with people. The knights thronged down the stairs; the domestics leaped the snow rampart to look upon the body. Everywhere could be heard such exclamations as: "Here is God's judgment! Jurand has assuredly a worthy successor! Praise and thanks to him! He is truly a fellow to wield an axe!" Others exclaimed: "Look and admire! Jurand himself could not have cut more honestly!"

A crowd of curious spectators gathered round the body

of Rotgier, as he lay with a face pale as snow, with lips wide open, his shoulder cut so terribly from the neck to the armpit that it was held only by a few fibres. Some admired his stature, for he covered a great space of the battle-ground and seemed even bigger after his death; some, his plume of peacock feathers, which stood out resplendent against the white snow; and others, his armour, which was held to be worth a considerable village. Hlawa the Bohemian now approached with two of Zbyszko's servants in order to remove the dead man's armour. The spectators then surrounded Zbyszko, praising and extolling him to the skies, for they considered that his glory must fall upon all the Mazovian and Polish knights. After unbuckling his helm and relieving him of his axe, Mrokota of Mocarzew and other knights conducted him to the Prince and Princess, who awaited him by the fireplace in a warm chamber. Zbyszko knelt before them, and after Father Wyszoniak had made the sign of the cross over him and said the prayers for the dead, the Prince embraced the young knight and said:

"God Almighty has pronounced judgment between you, and has guided your hand! Blessed be His name! Amen!"

Then addressing de Lorche and the other knights present, he added: "You, foreign knight, and all here present, I call to witness—as I myself attest—that they fought according to law and custom, and according to the laws of God and of chivalry!"

The Polish and Mazovian knights signified their concurrence with loud vociferations. When the Prince's words had been translated to de Lorche, he rose and declared that if any one in Marienburg or at any other Court should dare to doubt it, he, de Lorche, would instantly challenge him to mortal combat, even should his opponent be some giant or sorcerer.

Meanwhile the Princess Anna Danuta stooped towards Zbyszko as he kissed her feet, and said:

"Why are you not joyful? Thank God and be comforted, for if He in His mercy has rescued you from this danger He will not forsake you in the future."

"How can I be glad, your Highness?" answered Zbyszko. "God has indeed granted me revenge and victory over the Knight of the Cross, but Danusia is not yet here, and I am no nearer to her than before."

"Your bitterest foes—Danveld, Gottfried, and Rotgier—are not alive," said the Princess, "and they say that Siegfried von Loewe is more righteous, although cruel. For this, then, praise God's mercy! De Lorche, too, has said that if the Knight of the Cross should fall dead, he would carry his body home, and then go at once to Marienburg and claim Danusia from the Grand Master himself. They will not dare disobey him."

"God bless de Lorche!" said Zbyszko. "I will go with him to Marienburg."

The Princess was startled. It was as if he had said that he would go unarmed among the wolves which in winter haunted the dark forests of Mazovia.

"To Marienburg!" she exclaimed. "To certain death! After this combat neither de Lorche nor the letters written by Rotgier before the fight will help you. You will save no one, and you yourself will be undone!"

"So help me God!" said Zbyszko, rising and clasping his hands, "I will go to Marienburg, or even beyond the seas! So bless me Christ, I will seek after her until the last breath of my nostrils, and I will not desist unless I perish! Better that I should fight in armour and vanquish Germans than that the orphan should groan in a dungeon. Better indeed!"

The Princess saw that it would be in vain to try to dissuade him—that to do so he himself would have to be placed in irons and thrown into a dungeon.

Zbyszko, however, could not depart immediately, for chivalrous custom required the victor in a combat to spend the whole day upon the scene of the fight, in order to show that he was master of the field and that he was ready for a fresh contest should any of the friends of the vanquished wish to challenge him. After refreshing himself with a little food, therefore, he again donned his armour and remained in the castle-yard until midnight, beneath the gloomy sky, awaiting any enemy who might appear. It was only then, after the heralds had proclaimed his victory with the blast of trumpets, that Mikolaj of Dlugolas summoned him to supper and, at the same time, to a consultation with the Prince.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE Prince was the first to speak.

"It is a pity that we have no witnesses or written proofs against the Komthurs," he said, "for, although our suspicions seem to be founded, and I myself think that they and no one else have seized Jurand's daughter, they will assuredly deny it. And when the Grand Master asks for proofs, what shall we show him? Jurand's letter, indeed, bears witness in their favour."

"You say," he continued, turning to Zbyszko, "that they extorted the letter from him by threats. It may be, and probably is so. But if they extorted one, they might equally well have extorted two letters. Perhaps they had also a writing of Jurand testifying that they are not guilty of the abduction of the unhappy maid. In that case they will produce it before the Master, and what will be the result?"

"Still, your Highness, they themselves acknowledge that they rescued Danusia from the robbers, and that they still have her."

"I know it. But now they say they were mistaken and that the rescued girl is another, and the best proof of this is that Jurand himself has denied her."

"He denied her because they showed him another whereby they exasperated him."

"Assuredly it was so, but they may say that these are but suppositions."

"Their lies are even as a forest," said Mikolaj of Dlugolas. "On the border something may, perhaps, be seen, but the farther one goes the denser grows the thicket, and one loses one's way and goes astray."

"The Grand Master himself is better than they," said de Lorche, "and his brother too, for, although insolent by nature, he is nevertheless very sensitive with regard to knightly honour."

"It is so," answered Mikolaj. "The Master is a worthy man; he is unable, indeed, to restrain the komthurs or the chapters, and although he cannot prevent the injuries done to humanity by the Order, such acts do not give him pleasure. Go, then, Knight de Lorche, and tell him what has happened here. They care more for foreigners than for us, fearing lest they should tell of their treachery and misdeeds at foreign Courts. If the Master asks you for proofs, then say to him, 'It is for God to know the truth; to seek it is the business of men. So, if you would have proofs, let them be sought. Search the castles, inquire among the people; permit us also to search, for it is foolish and false to say that the maid has been seized by the forest robbers.'"

"And you," said the Prince, turning to Zbszyko, "are you quite determined to go?"

"Quite, your Highness. What else should I do? I would have taken Szczytno, even should I have had to bite through its walls with my teeth. But how could I wage war without permission?"

"Well," said the Prince, "we have already heard from Rotgier that out of the four men only old Siegfried is alive; the others God has punished by your hand and Jurand's. As for Siegfried, he is not so great a scoundrel as the others, but he is perhaps the most cruel. It is unfortunate that Jurand and Danusia are in his hands, and they must be rescued quickly. But lest any mishap should befall you, I will give you a letter to the Master. Listen attentively, and understand that you do not go as an envoy, but as an emissary. 'Since they once made an attempt upon our person,' I write to the Master, 'upon the descendant of their benefactor, it is therefore probable—they, having a spite against Jurand—that they have seized his daughter.' I have requested the Master, therefore, to command a diligent search to be made for her, and, if he desires my friendship, to restore her to your hands at once."

"And Jurand, your Highness!" said Zbyszko, throwing himself at the Prince's feet; "what of Jurand? Interpose also on his behalf. If he be mortally wounded let him at least die in his own house and in the presence of his children."

"There is something concerning Jurand also," said the Prince kindly. "The Master must send two judges, and

I also will send two. These will investigate the acts of the komthurs and of Jurand according to the laws of chivalry. They will elect one more judge who shall be their chief, and it shall be as they may decide."

The consultation ended, and Zbyszko took leave of the Prince, for they were to set out at once. But before separating, Mikolaj of Dlugolas took Zbyszko aside.

"The Bohemian, your servant," said he, "do you mean to take him with you to the Germans?"

"Assuredly; he will not forsake me. Why do you ask?"

"Because I am sorry for him. You will carry your head back from Marienburg, unless while fighting there you meet a stronger adversary, but he will go to certain death."

"For what reason?"

"Because those hounds have accused him of stabbing de Fourcy to death. They have surely written to the Master of this, and they have surely written that his blood was shed by the Bohemian. In Marienburg they will not forgive him this. How will you convince the Grand Master of his innocence? Moreover, he did indeed shatter the shoulder of Danveld, who was a relative of the Master. I am sorry for him, but I tell you again that, if he goes, it will be to his death."

"He shall not go to his death," said Zbyszko, "for I will leave him in Spychow."

It happened otherwise, however, for there were reasons why Hlawa should not remain in Spychow. Next day Zbyszko and de Lorche set out together along with their retainers. De Lorche, whom Father Wyszonic had absolved of his vows in regard to Ulryka von Elner, rode along happily, meditating in silence on the beauty of Jagienka of Dlugolas. Zbyszko, however, could not speak to him of Danusia, for they could not understand each other well enough; he therefore talked with Hlawa, who had not hitherto learnt anything of the proposed expedition into the dominions of the Knights of the Cross.

"We ride to Marienburg," said he, "and when I shall return God only knows. Perhaps very soon, perhaps in the spring, perhaps in a year's time, perhaps never at all—do you understand?"

"I do. Your Grace doubtless goes thither to challenge

the knights of other lands. God be praised that every knight has a groom by his side!"

"No," answered Zbyszko; "I do not go to challenge other knights, unless that should be unavoidable. And as for you, you will not go at all, but remain at home in Spychow."

On hearing this the Bohemian grieved exceedingly, and began to beg his young master not to leave him.

"I have sworn not to leave your Grace," he said; "I have sworn by the cross and upon my honour. If your Grace should meet with a mishap, how could I show myself before my lady in Zgorzelice! I have sworn this to her, lord, therefore have mercy on me, lest I should be disgraced in her eyes."

"Did you not swear to her that you would obey me?" asked Zbyszko.

"I did; but in all things except going away. If your Grace should drive me away, I will ride behind at a distance so that I may be at hand in case of need."

"I do not drive you away, and I will not do so," answered Zbyszko, "but it would be bondage for me if I could not send you anywhere, however far, or get rid of you even for a day. Know, then, that now it would be worse for me with you, and that you might expose me to danger."

"How so, your Grace?"

Zbyszko told Hlawa that he had heard from Mikolaj of Dlugolas how the komthurs, being unwilling to confess themselves guilty of the death of de Fourcy, had accused the Bohemian, and purposed pursuing him with vengeance. Upon hearing this Hlawa grew gloomy, for he recognised the truth of his master's words. Nevertheless, he endeavoured to turn the matter according to his own wishes.

"But those who saw me," he said, "are no longer alive, for some, they say, were slain by the old lord of Spychow, and Rotgier by your Grace."

"The soldiers who rode behind them at a distance saw you, and the old Knight of the Cross is still alive, and doubtless lives in Marienburg now, or if he does not he will come, for the Master will summon him—so grant it God!"

No further answer was possible, and they rode to Spychow in silence. There they found everything in

complete readiness for war, for old Tolima anticipated either that the Knights of the Cross would attack the castle, or that Zbyszko, on his return, would lead them to rescue their old lord. Sentries were posted everywhere. The peasants were armed, and awaited the Germans with eagerness, for they hoped for splendid booty. In the castle Zbyszko and de Lorche were met by Father Kaleb, who as soon as supper was over showed him a parchment bearing Jurand's seal, upon which he had written the Knight of Spychow's last testament.

"He dictated it to me," said he, "on the night when he set out for Szczytno. He did not expect to return."

"Why, then, did you say nothing?" asked Zbyszko.

"I said nothing because he told me what he purposed doing in confession. God give him eternal rest, and let the divine light shine upon him eternally!"

"Say no prayers for him! He is still alive. I know it from the mouth of Rotgier, the Knight of the Cross with whom I fought at the Prince's Court. There was an ordeal between us, and I slew him."

"So much the more unlikely is Jurand's return. Unless God help——"

"I am going with this knight to take him out of their hands."

"Then you plainly know not the hands of the Knights of the Cross. I know them, for before Jurand took me under his protection in Spychow I was for fifteen years a priest in their country. God alone can save Jurand!"

"But He may aid us also."

"Amen!"

The priest unfolded the document and began to read it. Jurand bequeathed all his lands and estates to Danusia and her descendants, and in the event of her death without issue, to her husband Zbyszko of Bogdaniec. After having read the document to Zbyszko, the priest read it to the older men of the garrison, who at once acknowledged the young knight as their master's successor and promised him obedience. They had believed that Zbyszko would at once lead them to rescue the old lord. A great grief seized them, therefore, when they learnt that they were to remain behind, and that Zbyszko would proceed to Marienburg with a small retinue, not to wage war, but to prefer a complaint. Hlawa the Bohemian also shared their sorrow, although, on the other

hand, he was glad of such a considerable increase to his master's property.

"Hah!" he exclaimed; "who will be so glad as the old lord of Bogdaniec? He would know how to rule here! What is Bogdaniec in comparison with such a patrimony?"

A sudden yearning for his uncle seized Zbyszko, and addressing his servant, he said hastily:

"Why should you remain here to no purpose? Ride off to Bogdaniec—you shall carry a letter."

"If I am not to go with your Grace, I should indeed prefer to ride thither," answered the delighted Bohemian.

"Summon Father Kaleb and let him write down carefully all that has happened here, and the parson of Krzesnia, or the abbot, if he is in Zgorzelice, will read it to my uncle."

Instantly the figure of Jagienka seemed to flit before him, with her blue eyes, dark hair, and hind-like grace. But as he looked she had tears in her eyes, and he felt sad. For a time he pressed his hand to his forehead.

"You will indeed be grieved, maid," he at length muttered, "but not more grieved than I."

Meanwhile Father Kaleb entered, and at once sat down to write. Zbyszko dictated to him all that had happened since his arrival at the forest-house. When, after much toil, the letter was written and closed with a seal, he again summoned Hlawa and handed it to him, saying:

"Perhaps my uncle will return along with you. If so, I shall be very glad."

The Bohemian's face was somewhat perplexed. He tarried, and did not seem to wish to go.

"If you have anything else to say," said Zbyszko, "then say it."

"I should like, your Grace," answered the Bohemian hesitatingly—"I should like to ask what I am to say to the people—the people there."

"The people? Where?"

"I mean, not in Bogdaniec, but in the neighbourhood. For they will assuredly wish to know."

Zbyszko resolved to have no further concealment.

"You care nothing about the people, but only about Jagienka of Zgorzelice!" said he, glancing at him sharply.

The Bohemian blushed and then turned pale.

"It is indeed for her," he said.

"And how do you know that she has not already married Cztan of Rogow or Wilk of Brzozowa?"

"The Panienka has not married any one," answered the servant emphatically.

"The abbot may have ordered her to do so."

"It is the abbot who obeys her, not she him."

"What then would you have? Speak the truth to her as to all."

The Bohemian bowed and took his leave, feeling not a little angry. "God grant that she may have forgotten you!" said he to himself. "God grant her a husband even better than you! But even if she has not forgotten, then I will tell her truly that you are married, but wifeless, and that you are more like to be a widower than enter the marriage bed."

Meanwhile Zbyszko was impatient to set out. It was necessary to remain at least one night in Spychow, if only for the preparations required for such a journey. Moreover, he was himself fatigued by fighting, travel, lack of sleep, and grief. Late at night, therefore, he threw himself on Jurand's hard bed, hoping that at least a short slumber would be vouchsafed him. But before he could fall asleep there was a knock at his door, and Sanderus entered and bowed before him.

"You rescued me from death," he said, "and it is long since I have been so comfortable as with you. God has now bestowed upon you a large estate, so that you are richer than before, and the treasury of Spychow is assuredly not empty. Give me, therefore, your Grace, a goodly purse of money, and I will go from one castle to another in Prussia; although I shall not be in safety there, I may nevertheless be able to do you some service."

At first Zbyszko thought of turning him out of the room, but, after reflecting upon what Sanderus had said, he took a large bag from the travelling trunk which stood by the bedside, and threw it towards him.

"There!" said he. "Now go. If you are a rogue you will cheat me; if you are an honest man you will do me some service."

"As a rogue I will cheat, but not your Grace," answered Sanderus. "I will indeed honestly help you."

CHAPTER XL.

SIEGFRIED VON LÖWE was on the point of setting out for Marienburg when the messenger brought him Rotgier's letter from the Mazovian Court. The news it contained greatly excited the old Knight of the Cross. It was clear that Rotgier had submitted the affair in which Jurand was concerned most admirably to the Prince. As he read, Siegfried smiled at Rotgier's demand that the Prince should compensate the Order's injuries with the gift of Spychow. Rotgier further informed him that, the better to show the Order's innocence of the abduction of Jurand's daughter, he had thrown down his gauntlet before the Mazovian knights. "No one did pick it up," he wrote, "for all knew that the letter of Jurand himself bore witness in our favour, and they therefore feared God's justice. Then the stripling whom we met at the forest-manor appeared and picked up the gage. For this cause, wise and pious brother, do not wonder if my return be delayed, for, having myself challenged, I must appear against him. And as I did it for the glory of the Order, I trust that neither the Grand Master nor yourself, whom I respect and love with filial heart, will take it amiss of me. My adversary is but a child, and with fighting, as you know, I am not unacquainted. I will not, therefore, fail to shed his blood for the glory of the Order, especially with the help of our Lord Jesus, who assuredly cares more for those who bear His cross than for a Jurand or the wrongs of a wretched wench of the Mazovian nation!"

The news that Jurand's daughter was married surprised, and even alarmed, the old Komthur.

"He will assuredly not desist from vengeance," he reflected, thinking of Zbyszko, "especially if he should get back his wife, for she would tell him that we abducted her from the forest-house. Moreover, it will also be shown that we summoned Jurand only to work his destruction, and that we had no thought of restoring his daughter."

It occurred to Siegfried that, in consequence of the Prince's letters, the Grand Master would institute an inquiry in Szczytno, if only to exculpate himself with the Prince, for the Master and the Chapter were most anxious that, in the event of a war with the mighty King of Poland, the Mazovian princes should remain neutral. The Mazovian nobility were both numerous and brave, and were therefore not to be trifled with. Peace with them, moreover, would secure to a great extent the Teutonic frontier, and enable the Order to concentrate its forces to better advantage.

Old Siegfried, who, in spite of his readiness for any crime, treachery, and cruelty, loved the Order and its glory, began to make accounts with his conscience. He reflected that it would perhaps be better to set Jurand and his daughter free. Ignominy must fall upon Danveld's name; but Danveld was no longer alive. And even should the Grand Master punish Rotgier and himself severely—they being partners in Danveld's misdeeds—would not that benefit the Order? But here his vengeful and cruel heart began to rage at the thought of Jurand.

To release Jurand, the oppressor and terror of the Order, the victor in so many encounters, the slayer of Danveld, of von Bergow, of Meineger, of Gottfried and Hughes, the man who in Szczytno alone had shed more German blood than many a battle costs—at the thought of it Siegfried clenched his fingers and gasped:

"I cannot! I cannot!"

Still, he asked himself, was it necessary for the greater glory and profit of the Order? Would not the punishment, which might fall on men still living, conciliate Prince Janusz, hitherto an enemy, and facilitate an understanding or even an alliance with him? With such thoughts Siegfried paced up and down the hall. At length he stopped before the crucifix, which occupied almost the whole height of the wall between two windows opposite the entrance, and knelt beneath it.

"Do Thou, O Lord," he exclaimed, "enlighten me and teach me, for I do not know! If I give up Jurand and his daughter, our deeds must appear in their naked truth, and men will not say, 'Danveld did it, or Siegfried'—they will say, 'The Knights of the Cross!' and infamy may fall upon the whole Order, and the hatred in the

Prince's heart will become deeper even than before. If I do not give them up, but conceal or slay them, suspicion will rest upon the Order, and I must pollute my lips with a lie before the Master. Which is better, O Lord?—teach me, enlighten me! If Thy vengeance consume me, so be it, according to Thy justice. It concerns Thy Order, and what Thou shalt command I will do, even if I lie in dungeons and chains until my death!”

He leaned his forehead on the wood of the cross and prayed in silence for a long time, for it did not occur to him that his prayer was sinful and blasphemous. When he rose he was calmer, feeling that the grace of the cross had imparted a clearer and simpler thought to his mind. A voice had seemed to say to him: “Rise and await Rotgier's return!”

Yes, it behoved him to wait. Rotgier, he assured himself, would certainly slay the youth Zbyszko, and afterwards it would be necessary either to conceal Jurand and his daughter or set them free. In the first event, the Prince would not indeed forget them, but, possessing no certainty as to the abductors of the girl, he would search for her and send letters to the Grand Master, not with accusations, but with inquiries, and so the matter would be indefinitely delayed. In the second event, the joy caused by the return of Jurand's daughter would be greater than the wish for revenge. Moreover, they could, in any case, say that they had found her after Jurand's assault. This last thought set his heart completely at rest. In regard to Jurand himself, they had, with Rotgier, long ago devised means whereby, in the event of it being necessary to release him, he should be unable either to avenge himself or to accuse. This thought rejoiced Siegfried's cruel soul. He rejoiced, too, at the ordeal which was to take place at the castle of Ciechanow, for the result gave him no uneasiness. It was an ordeal which would clear the Order of all suspicion.

“An ordeal! God's judgment!” he exclaimed, but at the same moment a feeling almost of alarm seized his heart. Rotgier was to fight to the death in defence of the Order's innocence. But they were in truth guilty, and therefore he would be fighting for a lie! What if some misfortune should occur? After a moment's thought this seemed to Siegfried impossible. Yes, Rotgier was right when he wrote that the Lord Jesus must care more

for those bearing His cross than for Jurand and the wrongs of a Mazovian wench. In three days Rotgier would return, and he would return as a victor.

After the day on which Rotgier had promised to return two days passed, and then a third and a fourth. Yet no horsemen appeared before the gates of Szczytno. Only on the fifth day, at dusk, a horn resounded. Siegfried, who had just finished his evening prayers, at once sent out a boy to inquire who had arrived. The boy returned presently with a perturbed look in his face, which Siegfried, however, could not discern, as the fire in the chamber burned in a deep fireplace, and lighted the darkness but little.

"Have they arrived?" asked the old knight.

"Yes," answered the boy.

But in his voice there was something that alarmed the Knight of the Cross, for he rejoined:

"And Brother Rotgier?"

"They have brought Brother Rotgier."

Siegfried rose from his chair, and stood for a time holding the chair-arm with his hand, as if fearing that he might fall to the ground.

"Give me the mantle," he said in a stifled voice.

The boy threw the mantle over his shoulder, but he had apparently recovered his forces, for he himself pulled down the hood over his head and passed out of the chamber. He entered the castle-yard, where it was already dark, and went, with slow steps, towards the retinue, which had stopped near the gate. A dense crowd had already gathered, the scene being lit by a few torches which had been brought by the soldiers of the garrison. The grooms stepped aside at the sight of the old knight. By the light of the torches could be seen frightened faces, while in the darkness low voices could be heard whispering:

"Brother Rotgier. . . ."

"Brother Rotgier is slain. . . ."

Siegfried drew nearer the sledge, on which a body lay covered up with a mantle among the straw, and raised one side of the mantle.

"Bring the light nearer," he said, drawing aside his hood.

One of the grooms lowered the torch, and by its light the old Knight of the Cross saw Rotgier's head, his face

white as snow and frozen, bound round with a dark kerchief which passed under the chin, evidently to prevent his lips from remaining open. His whole face was drawn and changed beyond recognition. For a long time the Komthur gazed in silence. The others watched him, for they knew that he had loved the dead man like a son. No tear came from his eyes, but his face was more severe than usual.

"Thus they have sent him back!" he said at length.

Then, turning to the steward, he said:

"Let the coffin be ready before midnight, and lay the body in the chapel."

"There is one coffin left of those made for the men killed by Jurand," answered the steward; "I will have it covered with cloth."

"And cover him with a mantle," said Siegfried, as he veiled Rotgier's face; "with a mantle, not like this, but with that of the Order."

"And do not close the lid," he added after a pause.

The people approached the sledge, and Siegfried pulled his hood over his head again. Before withdrawing, however, he seemed to recollect something.

"Where is von Krist?" he asked.

"Slain likewise," answered one of the grooms, "but they had to bury him in Ciechanow, for he began to putrefy."

"It is well."

Having said this, he went slowly away and, returning to the chamber, sat down in the same chair where he had received the news. He sat motionless so long that the boy began to grow uneasy, and put his head in through the door oftener and oftener. It was nearly midnight when the old knight awoke as if from sleep and called him.

"Where is Brother Rotgier?" he asked.

The lad, perturbed by the stillness, the events of the day, and sleeplessness, apparently did not understand him, for he looked at Siegfried in fear, and answered in a trembling voice:

"I do not know, master."

The old man smiled with a heart-breaking smile and said softly:

"I ask you, child, whether he is already in the chapel?"

"He is, master."

"That is well. Go and tell Diederich to come here

with a lantern and wait until I return. Let him also bring a caldron with coals. Are there lights in the chapel?"

"The candles are burning by the coffin."

Siegfried put on his mantle and went out. On reaching the chapel he looked round from the door to see whether there was anyone there. He then shut it carefully, approached the coffin, put aside two of the six candles which were burning in large copper candlesticks beside it, and knelt down. His lips did not move, for he was not praying. For some time he gazed on the torpid but still handsome face of Rotgier, as if anxious to discover some sign of life. Then, in the stillness of the chapel, he called in a low voice:

"My son! My son!"

He was silent, and it seemed as if he were awaiting an answer. Then, stretching out his hands, he thrust his thin, claw-like fingers under the mantle covering Rotgier's breast and began probing it with them. He searched everywhere, in the middle and at the sides, beneath the ribs and along the shoulder-blades. At last, discovering the cleft which ran from the top of the right shoulder to the armpit, he plunged his fingers in, thrusting them through the whole length of the wound.

"What a pitiless blow!" he said in a voice which seemed to throb as if with reproach. "And you said he was a mere child! The whole arm! The whole arm! You have raised it so often against the heathen in the Order's defence. And now the Polish axe has severed it! This, then, is the end! Jesus Christ has not helped you, for evidently He cares more for a single human wrong than for our whole Order. In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, you have defended an injustice, and for injustice' sake you have been slain, without absolution, and perhaps your soul——"

The words broke off on his lips, which had begun to tremble, and there was again deep silence in the chapel.

"My son! My son!" he exclaimed presently in a tone of entreaty. Then, in a lower voice, as of one inquiring touching some great and dreadful mystery, he cried:

"Merciful Christ! . . . If you are not damned, give me a sign. Move a hand or open your eyes for a moment, for my heart whines within my old breast. Give me a sign, for I truly loved you! Speak!"

And leaning his hands on the edges of the coffin, he fixed his vulture-like eyes on Rotgier's closed lids and waited.

"Ah!" said he at length, "how could you speak, with corruption even now upon you? But since you are silent, I will tell you something, and may your soul fly hither among the burning candles and listen." So saying, he bent over towards the corpse's face.

"Do you remember, when the chaplain would not permit us to slay Jurand, what we did swear to him? Well, I will keep the oath, and wherever your soul may be, I will gladden it even if I myself be damned!"

Having said this, he withdrew from the coffin, replaced the candlesticks, covered the body and the face with the mantle, and left the chapel. At the door of the chamber the servant lay overpowered with a deep sleep, while within Diederich awaited Siegfried. Diederich was a short sturdy fellow, with bowed legs and a square face, partly veiled by a dark hood, which descended to his shoulders. He wore a jacket of undressed buffalo skin, and a girdle of the same material, in which were stuck a bundle of keys and a short knife. In his right hand he carried an iron lantern, and in the other a small copper caldron and a torch.

"Are you ready?" asked Siegfried.

Diederich bowed in silence.

"I ordered you to have coals in your caldron."

Again the man did not answer a word, but pointed with his finger at the logs of wood burning in the fireplace. He then took an iron shovel which stood by, and began drawing coals from beneath the logs and putting them in the caldron. Finally, he lit the lantern and waited.

"And now, dog," said Siegfried, "listen! Formerly, you babbled of what the Komthur Danveld ordered you to do, therefore the Komthur had your tongue cut out. But as you are able by means of your fingers to tell the chaplain everything you wish, I now warn you that, if you disclose to him, even by a single movement, that which you will now do by my order, then I will have you hanged."

Once more Diederich bowed in silence, but his face contracted ominously, as if with some awful recollection, for his tongue had been cut out for a reason completely different from that given by Siegfried.

"Proceed," said Siegfried, "and lead me to Jurand's dungeon."

With his gigantic hand the hangman seized the handle of the caldron and lifted the lantern. They went out, passed the servant asleep behind the door, and, having descended the staircase, proceeded, not towards the principal door, but towards a narrow corridor at the back of the stairs, which ran through the whole breadth of the structure and led to a heavy door hidden by a niche in the wall. Diederich opened the door, and they entered a small courtyard, enclosed by four stone granaries, in which the corn was stored. On the right were the dungeons. There was no sentry, for even had a prisoner succeeded in breaking out of his dungeon, he would still have been imprisoned in the yard, from which the only exit was by the door.

"Wait!" said Siegfried.

He stood still and supported himself against the wall with his hand, for he felt as if what he was about to do were too much for his feeble forces. Beneath the hood his forehead was suffused with drops of sweat, and he felt the need of rest for a moment.

The night was calm and peaceful. The whole court was filled with the bright light of the moon, which shed a green tint over the snow. Siegfried eagerly breathed in the fresh frosty air. But as he did so he recollected that it was in such a night that Rotgier had set out for Ciechanow, from which he was brought back a corpse.

"And now he lies in the chapel," he muttered.

Diederich, thinking that the Komthur spoke to him, raised the lantern and shed the light on his face. It was terribly pale and corpse-like, and had, at the same time, the expression of an old vulture.

"Proceed!" said Siegfried at length.

The yellow circle of light from the lantern danced to and fro upon the snow as they went on. In the thick granary wall was a recess, where a few steps led to a large iron door. This Diederich opened, and began descending the steps, which led deep down into the darkness, constantly raising the lantern to light the Komthur's way. At the foot of the stairs was a corridor, and opening upon the corridor to the right and left were the low doors of the cells.

"To Jurand!" said Siegfried.

In a moment the bolts jarred, and they entered. It was quite dark in the dungeon, and Siegfried, who could not see well by the faint light of the lantern, ordered the torch to be lit, and then, by the strong light of its flame, he saw Jurand lying on the straw which covered the floor. The prisoner had irons on his feet, and on his hands a chain long enough to permit him to carry food to his lips. He was clad in the same sackcloth in which he appeared before the Komthurs, but now it bore dark stains of blood. In the castle it had been believed that he would die at any moment, but his enormous strength had overpowered death, and he still lived, although his wounds had not been dressed, and he had been thrown into a dungeon, in which water dripped from the roof on days of thaw and the walls were covered with crystals of ice during frosts.

As his gigantic form lay on the straw looking like a mass of rock hewn into human shape, Siegfried gazed upon him in silence. Then, turning to Diederich, who held the lantern close to the prisoner's face, he said:

"You see that he has but one eye. Trickle it out."

His voice was faint and trembling. The torch shook in the hangman's hand as he inclined it, and presently great burning drops of pitch fell down on Jurand's eye, at length covering it completely from the brow to the cheek-bone. Jurand's face shrivelled, his fallow moustache bristled and disclosed his clenched teeth, but he did not utter a sound.

"You were promised your freedom," said Siegfried, "and your freedom you shall have. But you shall never be able to inculcate the Order, for the tongue with which you blasphemed it shall be taken from you also."

Again he made a sign to Diederich, but the hangman gave vent to a strange guttural sound, and at the same time indicated by signs that he should require both his hands. The old Komthur, therefore, took the torch and held it out with a trembling hand, and when Diederich knelt and pressed his knees upon Jurand's breast he turned his head and gazed at the hoar frost on the wall. For a moment there was the clash of chains and the panting from two men's breasts. Something like a hollow moan was heard, and there was silence.

At length the voice of Siegfried sounded anew.

"Jurand," said he, "the punishment which you have suffered must needs have fallen upon you. But besides I

have vowed to Rotgier, whom your daughter's husband has slain, that I shall place your right hand in his coffin."

And Diederich again stooped over Jurand.

When the old Komthur and Diederich again entered the courtyard, the moon was still shining. After passing through the corridor, Siegfried took from the hangman's hands the lantern and a dark object wrapped in a rag.

"Now, back to the chapel," he muttered to himself, "and then to the tower."

Diederich glanced at him sharply, but the Komthur ordered him off to sleep and trudged on alone, swinging the lantern, towards the shining windows of the chapel. As he went he thought over what had happened. He felt that for him also the end was approaching, and that these were the last deeds on earth for which he should answer to God. He reflected, however, that Diederich, being dumb, could not disclose anything. Although he could make himself understood by the chaplain, he would not dare to do so. Who, then, could prove that Jurand did not receive all those wounds in the fight? His tongue he might well have lost by a spear-thrust between the teeth; a sword or an axe might well have chopped off his right hand; and as he had but one eye, what wonder if it was struck out in his mad rush against the whole garrison of Szczytno? The heart of the old Knight of the Cross trembled with joy—the last joy of his life. Yet Jurand, if he lived, must be set free. He thought of the recent discussion with Rotgier, and the younger brother's jocular saying: "Then let him go *wheresoever his eyes may lead him*, and if he does not know the way to Spychow, then *let him inquire it*." For that which had now been done had, in part, already been arranged between them.

When Siegfried again entered the chapel, and, kneeling by the coffin, placed the bloody hand of Jurand at Rotgier's feet, the joy which a moment before had throbbled within him was now reflected in his face.

"See," said he, "I have done more than we resolved. King John of Luxemburg, though blind, went to battle nevertheless, and fell gloriously, but Jurand will never fight again; he will perish like a dog under a fence."

Again his breath failed him, and on his head he felt a burden as if of an iron helm, but this was only for a moment.

"Hah!" he said at length with a sigh, "the time approaches for me also. But if I am destined to live, I swear before you, my son, that I will lay upon your grave the hand which slew you also, unless I myself fall. Your murderer is still alive. . . ."

His teeth were clenched together, as if he had been seized with cramp, and the words seemed to break off on his lips.

"Yes," he went on in a trembling voice, after a pause, "your murderer is still alive; but I will yet lay hold of him, and before I slay him I will inflict upon him other torments worse than death itself."

He was silent for a time. Then he rose, and, approaching the coffin, said calmly:

"I will now bid you farewell. I will look on your face once again; perhaps I shall see whether you are content with my vow. For the last time, then!"

As he spoke he unveiled Rotgier's face, but shrank back instantly.

"You smile," he said, "but your smile is terrible!"

The face of the young Komthur was indeed horrible. His ears were enormously swollen and discoloured, and his blue puffed-up lips were contorted as if by a smile. Siegfried hurriedly covered up the terrible human mask, took the lantern, and went out. As he went, his breath forsook him for the third time, and when he reached his chamber he threw himself on his hard monastic bed, and for a time lay quite motionless. He expected to fall asleep, but suddenly a strange feeling seized him. It seemed to him that sleep would never again come to him, but that, if he should remain in the chamber, death would come in its place. Siegfried did not fear death. In his great weariness and despair of sleep he saw in death merely some great repose. Nevertheless, he did not desire to yield to it that night, and he sat up on his couch and cried:

"God grant me until to-morrow!"

Suddenly, he heard a voice which seemed to whisper clearly in his ear:

"Leave the chamber! To-morrow will be too late; to-morrow you will be unable to perform what you have promised. Leave the chamber!"

With difficulty he rose and went out. The sentries were calling to one another on the battlements. The yellow light from the chapel windows fell upon the snow. By a

stone well in the middle of the courtyard, two black dogs were playing together, dragging about a rag. Otherwise, the court was empty and still.

"Must it then be to-night?" said Siegfried. "I am infinitely weary, but I must go. . . . All are asleep. Jurand, overpowered by his torments, is perhaps asleep also. But I will not sleep. I go because death is in the chamber, and I have vowed. . . . Let death then come, since sleep will not. . . . You lie there smiling, and I lose my strength. You smile, and you are therefore glad. But see! My fingers grow stiff, my strength has left my hands, and I shall not accomplish it alone. It must be done by the servant who is asleep by her. . . ."

As he spoke he went with unsteady steps towards the gate-tower. Meanwhile the dogs recognised him, and began fawning upon him. One of them Siegfried recognised as a bull-dog which was the inseparable companion of Diederich, of whom it was said in the castle that he made use of the animal as his pillow. The dog gave several low barks, and preceded the Komthur in the direction of the tower, as if divining his intentions. On reaching the door of the tower, which at night was bolted from the outside, he pushed the bolts aside and, entering, groped for the balustrade of the stairs, which began immediately behind the door. Then he began the ascent. In his distraction he had forgotten the lantern, and he had to proceed gropingly, feeling cautiously for each step with his feet. After ascending a few steps, he paused, for above him, but quite close, he heard something like the heavy breathing of a man or a beast.

"Who is there?" he asked.

There was no answer; the breathing only grew quicker. Siegfried withdrew almost to the entrance.

"Who is there?" he repeated, in a choking voice.

As he spoke, something pushed against his breast with such violence that he fell in a swoon through the open door, without even a groan. Silence followed. Then a dark form slunk out from the tower and ran furtively towards the stables beside the arsenal on the left side of the court. Diederich's great bull-dog followed the form silently. The other dog also sprang after them and vanished in the shadow of the wall. Soon he re-appeared, running back with

his nose to the ground, as if scenting the traces of the figure and the other dog. He approached Siegfried, who lay motionless, and, after smelling him diligently, sat down at his head, lifted up his nose, and began to howl. The howling resounded for a long time, filling the gloomy night with a new melancholy and dread. At length the wicket of the great gate jarred, and the gatekeeper entered the courtyard with a halberd.

"A plague upon the dog!" said he. "I will teach you to howl at night!"

And, raising the halberd, he was about to pierce the creature's breast, when he saw the form of someone lying close to the open gate of the tower.

"Lord Jesus!" he exclaimed. "What is this?"

Bending down, he looked into the face of the man as he lay, and began to shout:

"Come out! Come out! Help! Help!"

Then, leaping towards the gate, he began pulling the bell-rope with all his strength.

PART VI.

CHAPTER XLI.

ALTHOUGH Hlawa hastened to Zgorzelice, he found that he could not proceed so quickly as he had hoped, for the roads were exceedingly difficult. A severe winter, with hard frosts and snows so abundant that whole villages had been covered, was followed by great thaws, mists, and heavy rains. In many places it was possible to get from one village to another only by boats. The greater portion of March had passed, therefore, and spring was already approaching, when the Bohemian at length approached Zgorzelice and Bogdaniec.

On reaching Bogdaniec, Hlawa was told that Macko had gone to the forest with the hounds and a crossbow. Before nightfall, however, he returned. At first he did not recognise Hlawa, but when the Bohemian announced his name he instantly became alarmed, and, throwing his crossbow and cap on the ground, exclaimed:

"By Heaven! They have slain him! Tell me what you know!"

"He is not slain," answered Hlawa; "he is in perfect health."

"The Lord Jesus be praised!" said Macko, drawing a deep breath. "Where, then, is he?"

"He has gone to Marienburg, and sent me hither with news."

"Why has he gone to Marienburg?"

"For his wife."

"What do you mean? By Christ's wounds!—What wife?"

"Jurand's daughter. But there is matter enough to speak of for a whole night. Allow me, your Honour, to

breathe a little, for I am terribly tired with travel, having ridden uninterruptedly since midnight."

On recovering somewhat from his astonishment, Macko called a servant, and ordered him to add wood to the fire and bring food for the Bohemian. He then began pacing up and down the chamber, swaying his hands and speaking to himself.

"Impossible to believe!" he exclaimed. "Jurand's daughter! Zbyszko married! . . ."

"Married, and yet not married," said Hlawa.

He proceeded to relate all that had happened, and Macko listened eagerly, interrupting him from time to time with questions when the story did not seem clear to him. Although Hlawa was unable to tell when Zbyszko was married—there having been no wedding feast—he informed Macko that the event had been announced to all after the arrival of Rotgier, whom Zbyszko had challenged to an ordeal, and fought before the whole Mazovian Court.

"What! Did he indeed fight?" exclaimed Macko, with flashing eyes. "Well—and what was the result?"

"Zbyszko cleft him in two; and me also God helped against Rotgier's groom."

"Well," said Macko, with a snort of satisfaction, "he is no fellow to laugh at! He is the last of the house of Grady, but—so help me, Heaven!—not the least. And then, against the Frisians! A worthy lad, indeed!"

He then eyed the Bohemian narrowly.

"And the booty?" he asked suddenly. "Is it valuable?"

"We took the armour, the horses, and ten men—eight of them my young master sends to you."

"What did he do with the other two?"

"He sent them away with the body."

"As if the Prince could not have sent his own men! Those two will never return!"

Hlawa smiled at the old man's cupidity.

"The young master need not heed it," said he; "Spychow is a large estate."

"A large estate! Yes, but what then? It is not yet his."

"Whose then is it?"

"What do you say?" said Macko, rising from his seat "And Jurand?"

"Jurand is with the Knights of the Cross in a dungeon

and death awaits him. God knows whether his life will be spared, or, if so, whether he will ever return! But Father Kaleb assuredly read his last testament, and proclaimed that the young master should be his heir."

This news made a great impression upon Macko. At first the knowledge that Zbyszko was married pained him, for he loved Jagienka like a daughter, and his heart had been set upon a union with her. Yet he had accustomed himself to regard this hope as frustrated; and besides, Jurand's daughter brought what Jagienka could not bring—the Prince's favour, as well as a much larger dowry. In his mind Macko already saw Zbyszko a count, the lord of Bogdaniec and Spychow, and even a castellan. His cupidity and family pride, therefore, were alike gratified. Yet there were reasons why the old man should be uneasy.

"They seized old Jurand and his daughter," he said to himself; "they seized even the Prince himself when he was in Zlotorja; why, then, should they not seize Zbyszko also?"

He then tried to conjecture what might happen if the youth, should he escape from the hands of the Knights of the Cross, was unable to recover his wife. Although he cared much for the property, the old man cared more for the family.

"If Danusia," he reflected, "should be lost, like a stone cast into water, and no one knows whether she is alive or dead, then Zbyszko will be unable to marry any other wife, and there will be no more Gradys of Bogdaniec in this world. Ah! with Jagienka it would be otherwise!"

There was a moment of silence.

"Do you think that the Knights of the Cross will restore her?" asked Macko.

The Bohemian shook his head despondingly.

"To the best of my judgment," he said slowly, "she is already lost for ever."

"Why?" asked Macko, almost frightened.

"If they avowed that they had her, there would be hope. But they say, 'We indeed rescued a maid, and we informed Jurand, but he denied her, and in return for our good will slew more of our men than we have lost in many a battle.'"

"Then they did show a damsel to Jurand?"

"They say they did. God alone knows. They may have shown him another girl. It is at least certain that he slew many of their men, and that they are ready to swear that

they never seized Jurand's daughter. Even if the Grand Master should order her to be released, they will swear that they have not had her. Who will prove it? In Ciechanow they talk of a letter written by Jurand wherein he declares that she is not with the Knights of the Cross."

"Perhaps she is not with them."

"But if robbers really seized her, your Honour, it was only to obtain ransom. Robbers would not be able to write a letter and forge Jurand's seal, or to send a handsome retinue for her."

"True; but why should the Knights of the Cross desire her?"

"What of vengeance on Jurand's blood? They love vengeance better than honey and wine, and of pretexts they have plenty."

"But what do you think they will do with her?" asked Macko.

"What did they do with the children of the mighty Kniaz Witold? Have not they enough castles, and dungeons, and wells, and chains, and halters?"

"By the living God!" exclaimed Macko.

"Although he went with a prince's letter, and was accompanied by de Lorche, a mighty lord and a relative of princes, God grant that they do not bury him alive or dead! I did not wish to come hither, as there was every prospect of fighting, but he ordered me to do so. Once I heard him ask the old Lord of Spychow whether he had cunning, as cunning was necessary when dealing with these Knights. 'Were my uncle Macko here,' he said, 'he would be useful.' It was for that reason that he sent me here."

"Well," said Macko, "there is no help for it. Against death even cunning cannot serve. But if I go there and learn that Danusia has been destroyed, then Spychow will in any case be left to Zbyszko, and he can return here and take another maid to wife."

"Jagienka of Zgorzelice?" asked Hlawa in a low timid voice.

"Yes," answered Macko, "the more so as she is an orphan, and Cztan of Rogow and Wilk of Brzozowa press their court upon her worse than ever."

"The Panienka an orphan!" exclaimed the Bohemian, leaping from his seat. "What of the knight Zych?"

"Then you have not yet heard?"

"By Heaven! What has happened?"

"How could you know? Yes, she is an orphan. The

abbot asked Zych to accompany him to Prince Przemko of Oswiecim, begging me to take care of Zgorzelice and Jagienka in his absence. They afterwards went to old Nosak, Przemko's father, who rules in Cieszyn. Then Jasko, the Prince of Raciborz, out of hatred for Przemko, set murderers against them under the command of the Bohemian Chrzan. Prince Przemko was slain, and Zych with him. They stunned the abbot with an iron flail, so that now he understands nothing, and has probably lost his speech. The old Prince Nosak was tortured to death. Six weeks ago they carried Zych hither and buried him."

"Such a strong man!" said Hlawa pityingly. "At Boleslawiec I was no cripple, but he captured me in the space of a Pater Noster. But that was a captivity such as I would not exchange for freedom. A good, worthy lord! God grant him eternal light! Ah, it is sad! And for Jagienka I am sorely sorry, poor child!"

"Zych's grave was not yet covered by the snow when Cztan and Wilk attacked the manor of Zgorzelice. Happily my men were warned beforehand, and I hastened to her aid, and with God's help we beat them soundly. After the fight, the maid clasped my knees and said, 'I cannot be Zbyszko's, so I will be no other's; only save me from these brutes, for I would have death before them!' Since then they have attacked us twice, but they could do nothing. At present there is peace, for they have fallen out together and mutilated one another, so that neither can move hand or foot."

On hearing this news, Hlawa merely gnashed his teeth in anger and cursed both Cztan and Wilk together.

Just at this moment voices sounded from the entrance-hall, the door opened, and Jagienka herself rushed in, followed by Jasko, her eldest brother, who resembled her as if they had been twins. Having heard from the peasants of Hlawa's arrival, she had imagined some misfortune, and had run on to Bogdaniec to learn the truth.

"What has happened?—for Heaven's sake?" she exclaimed almost before she had crossed the threshold.

"What could have happened?" answered Macko. "Zbyszko is alive and well!"

The Bohemian sprang towards his mistress, and, kneeling on one knee, began kissing the hem of her gown. She did not seem to observe this, for, on hearing the old knight's answer, she turned her face away from the firelight into the shadow; and it was only after several

moments had passed, that, as if recollecting that she had not yet greeted them, she said:

"Jesus Christ be praised!"

"Now and for ever!" responded Macko.

Then, seeing the Bohemian at her feet, she stooped towards him and said:

"I am glad to see you, Hlawa, with my whole soul; but why have you forsaken your master?"

"He sent me here, gracious Panienska."

"What did he command you?"

"He commanded me to come to Bogdaniec."

"To Bogdaniec? . . . And what else?"

"He sent me to obtain advice—and to greet——"

"To Bogdaniec, and that is all, is it not? Good! Where is he himself?"

"He has gone to Marienburg—to the Knights of the Cross."

Jagienka's face again showed uneasiness.

"Has he no care for his life? Why has he gone thither?"

"To seek, gracious lady, for that which he will never find again."

"Of what do you speak?" asked Jagienka.

But Macko interrupted her with another question.

"Did Zbyszko," he asked, "ever speak of Jurand's daughter? I have been told he did."

For a moment she did not reply. Then, stifling a sigh, she said:

"Indeed, he did speak of her. Why should he not have spoken?"

"It is well," answered the old man, "for what I have to say will be the easier."

He began to tell her what he had heard from the Bohemian, wondering that his narrative should sometimes seem so confused and difficult. But, as he was a cautious man, and anxious not to estrange Jagienka, he emphasised the probability, in which he himself believed, that Zbyszko was never really the husband of Danusia, and that she was lost to him for ever.

Hlawa confirmed his words by nodding his head at intervals, and by ejaculating "Assuredly!" "Without doubt!" and so forth, as Macko proceeded. The girl listened with her eyelashes sunk on her cheeks, asking nothing further, and so calm withal that Macko was apprehensive because of her silence.

"Well, what do you say?" he asked when he had finished.

She made no answer. But two tears glittered beneath her lowered eyelashes and glided down her cheeks. She approached Macko, and, having kissed his hand, said:

"Jesus Christ be praised!"

"Now and for ever!" answered the old man. "But why do you hasten home? Do stay with us."

But she would not stay, saying that at home she had not yet given out the provisions for supper. Although he knew that at Zgorzelice there was an old housekeeper named Siciechowa who could have filled her place, Macko merely stroked her head with his hand and conducted her to the courtyard, accompanied by Hlawa. But the Bohemian led a horse from one of the stables, threw himself on its back, and rode after his mistress.

When Macko re-entered the house he sighed, and nodding his head, muttered:

"This Zbyszko, forsooth, is foolish! The maid has left a fragrance behind her in the chamber!"

The old man grew sorrowful. If Zbyszko, he said to himself, were only to wed her when he returned, there might still be joy and consolation. But now!

"If one only mentions him," he exclaimed, "a tear instantly drops from her eye, and all the while the fellow is running about the world and will batter his head against the walls of Marienburg. And in this den there is no living soul—only armour grinning on the walls. Of what use is husbandry and industry, of Spychow and Bogłaniec, if there is no one to inherit them?"

Anger entered Macko's soul at the thought; and then, in a moment, it was followed by an ardent longing for Zbyszko. At one moment he resolved not to go after him, and the next he felt that he should never be able to remain patiently at home waiting.

"If I am to go," he said, "so be it; but who will be here to protect the girl from Człtan and Wilk? A plague upon them!"

Meanwhile, Jagienka rode through the forest with Jasko towards Zgorzelice, and the Bohemian followed silently behind, his heart full of sorrow and devotion. He had seen the girl's tears, and now, as he looked upon her dark form, hardly visible in the gloom of the forest, he understood anew her grief and pain. Jasko, after making several attempts, saw that his sister had no wish to talk, and the

two rode on in silence in front of Hlawa. When they were close to the house, the Bohemian at length advanced his horse to Jagienka's.

"Gracious Panienka——"

"So you ride with us?" said the girl, awakening as from a sleep. "What have you to say?"

"I have indeed forgotten to tell you what my master ordered me to say. At the very moment of my departure from Spychow he called me and said, 'Embrace the feet of the Panienka of Zgorzelice, for neither in good fortune nor in bad will I ever forget her; and for all she has done for my uncle and for me may God repay her and keep her in good health.'"

"May God bless him for his kind words!" answered Jagienka.

Then, after a moment's pause, she added, in such a strange voice, that the Bohemian's heart melted completely:

"And you, Hlawa, as well!"

The conversation ceased for a time. The Bohemian was pleased with himself, and began searching his mind for something else to tell her.

"Panienka!" said he presently.

"What now?"

"I should like to tell you, as I have told the old Lord of Bogdaniec also, that the lady is already lost for ever, and that Zbyszko will never find her, even if the Grand Master himself should help him."

"She is his wife," replied Jagienka.

"Such a wife!" said Hlawa, tossing his head.

Jagienka made no reply; but after supper, when Jasko and her younger brothers had gone to sleep, she had a jug of mead brought in, and, addressing the Bohemian, said:

"Perhaps you would prefer to rest, but for myself I should be glad to talk with you for a little."

Although much fatigued with travel, Hlawa was ready to talk till morning. So they talked—or rather he related to her anew all the adventures of Zbyszko, Danusia, Jurand, and himself.

CHAPTER XLII.

MACKO was preparing for his journey, and Jagienka did not appear in Bogdaniec for two days, she having passed the time in consultation with Hlawa. On the third day the old knight met her on the way to church.

She advanced to the head of the retinue, evidently not wishing the servants to hear their conversation. When Macko was close to her, she asked:

"Are you surely going?"

"If God will, to-morrow—not later."

"And to Marienburg?"

"To Marienburg, or elsewhere, according to circumstances."

"Then listen to me, for I must ask your counsel. I shall be left without protection. Have you devised anything?"

"Nothing. What do you wish?" he asked, looking at her sharply.

"Take me with you," she answered in a low voice.

Macko stopped his horse in amazement.

"By Heaven! What do you say, Jagienka?"

She sank her head timidly and sadly.

"Dear Macko," she said, "I prefer to speak frankly rather than conceal anything. You, as well as Hlawa, declare that Zbyszko will never find his lady, and the Bohemian looks for even worse things. God knows, I wish her no harm! May God's Mother protect and save her! Zbyszko loved her better than me—for that there is no help! But until he finds her, or if, as you believe, he never finds her—then—then——"

"What then?" asked Macko, seeing that the girl grew perplexed and hesitated more and more.

"Then I will be neither Cztan's, nor Wilk's, nor anyone else's."

"I thought you had long forgotten him," said he joyfully.

"Ah!" she exclaimed sadly.

"What then would you have?" asked Macko. "How can I take you among the Knights of the Cross?"

"You need not," said Jagienka. "I should be content to be by the side of the abbot, who lies ill at Sieradz. There is no friendly soul beside him, and he is my godfather and benefactor. Even were he in good health, I should still seek his protection, for people fear him."

"I will not dispute it," answered Macko, who was at heart glad of Jagienka's decision, for he really believed that Danusia would not get out of the hands of the Knights of the Cross alive. "But," he added, "a maid is a great trouble on a journey."

"Another girl, but not I," replied Jagienka. "It is no new thing for me to use a crossbow and to endure hardships in hunting. I am prepared for anything—do not fear! I will take Jasko's clothes, put my hair in a hood-net, gird myself with a sabre, and ride. Jasko resembles me so closely that you will see that neither the abbot nor anyone else will recognise me."

"Nor Zbyszko?"

"I may never see him."

"And Wilk and Cztan will probably go mad?"

"Then let them go mad! It will be worse if they follow us."

"I do not fear that. I am old, but they had better not come within my grasp."

Thus talking, they reached Krzesnia. Old Wilk was also in the church, and from time to time he looked darkly at Macko. But he paid no heed, and after mass he returned home with Jagienka, feeling light at heart. But after they had parted at the crossways and he reached Bogdaniec alone, he was assailed by less cheerful thoughts. He knew that if Jagienka went away neither Zgorzelice nor Jagienka's brothers would be exposed to danger, although Cztan and Wilk might stretch out their hands after the maid. Bogdaniec, however, would be left at God's mercy.

"Well, I must prevent it," thought he.

After dinner he had a horse saddled, and rode over to Brzozowa. It was dusk when he arrived. Old Wilk sat in the front chamber, with a jug of mead beside him, and his son, who had been disabled by Cztan, lay on a bench covered with skins, and drank also. As soon as the father

and son caught sight of Macko as he stood in the doorway they leaped to their feet, and, running to the wall, grasped the first weapons that came to hand. But Macko, who was not the least disconcerted, merely stood with his arms akimbo, and said calmly, but with a trace of mockery in his voice:

"How is this? Is such the chivalrous hospitality of Brzozowa?"

Their hands fell, and presently old Wilk dropped his sword on the floor with a crash, while the son threw down his spear, and both stood fronting Macko with threatening faces, in which astonishment mingled with shame.

"I have come as a neighbour—with good will," said Macko.

"With good will we greet you. A guest is sacred."

Both old Wilk and his son went towards Macko, shook his right hand, and led him to the seat of honour at the table. They then added some logs of wood to the fire, covered the table with a cloth, placed dishes containing food and drink, and all began to eat. Father and son were consumed with curiosity to learn the cause of Macko's visit, but neither asked him anything, waiting for him to speak. But Macko lauded the food, the drink, and their hospitality. Only when he had satisfied his hunger did he speak.

"It often happens that men quarrel, and even fight, with one another," he said gravely, looking straight before him, "but peace among neighbours is better than anything!"

"There is, indeed, nothing better than peace," answered old Wilk with the same gravity.

"It often happens also," said Macko, "that when a man must go on a long journey, although he may have been at enmity with some one, he regrets it, and would not willingly go away without greeting him."

"We are heartily glad to see you. Come every day, if you will."

"God grant that I too might honour you in Bogdaniec, as it behoves me that I should, but I must hasten away."

"Do you go to war, or to some holy place?"

"I should prefer either, but I am going among the Knights of the Cross."

"The Knights of the Cross!" exclaimed father and son together.

"Even so," answered Macko. "And whosoever, not being their friend, goes among them had best make his peace with God and man, lest he lose not only his life but his soul's salvation."

"Doubtless you go to ransom Zbyszko?"

At his father's mention of the name young Wilk grew pale with hatred, and looked threateningly.

But Macko answered calmly:

"To ransom, perhaps—but not Zbyszko."

These words only increased the curiosity of his listeners, and old Wilk was unable to restrain himself any longer.

"You are free to tell us or not why you go thither," he said.

"I will tell you," answered Macko. "But first know that I came here to ask you, as neighbours, to take Bogdaniec under your care while I am gone, and allow no one to do it any damage."

Both old and young Wilk were amazed, and could find no answer.

"I will honestly tell you from whom I fear a hurt," continued Macko, addressing them as if they had been his closest friends for years; "it is from none other than Cztan of Rogow. From you, even were we at enmity, I should fear nothing, for you are chivalrous men, and would not wreak unworthy vengeance behind one's back. But Cztan is a churl, and of him anything may be expected, the more so as he is terribly enraged against me for preventing him having Zych's daughter."

"Whom you are keeping for your nephew!" burst out young Wilk.

But Macko looked at him calmly, and said, turning to the father:

"My nephew has married a Mazovian heiress, and got a great dowry."

The father and son remained speechless for a time, and with open mouths.

"What!" said old Wilk at length. "How so? Why, they said that—— But tell me——"

"It is just because of this that I must go," Macko went on, without noticing the interruption, and therefore I ask you, as worthy and honest neighbours, to see to Bogdaniec, and permit no one to touch it—and especially Cztan."

Young Wilk, who was by no means dull witted, at once

saw that, since Zbyszko was married, it would be well to have Macko for a friend, as Jagienka trusted him and readily followed his counsels. Therefore, although a little tipsy, he hastily stretched out his hand beneath the table and pressed his father's knee as a warning that he should say nothing.

"Have no fear of Cztan!" he exclaimed. "Let him only dare! He has cut me about a little—true! But I have beat his shaggy snout so that his mother did not know him. Have no fear, but go with an easy mind, for not a crow will be missing from Bogdaniec!"

"You are honest folks, I see," said Macko. "So you promise?"

"We promise!" cried both. "On our honour!"

"Well," said Macko with a smile, "now I can tell you something more. Zych, as you know, entrusted me with the guardianship of his children. Because of this I prevented Cztan—and you, too, young man—from entering Zgorzelice by force. But when I am in Marienburg—or heaven knows where else—what guardianship can I exercise? It is true that any man who would injure orphan children would be declared infamous. Still I am sorry to go. Do you, therefore, also swear that you will not only do no injury to Zych's children yourselves, but that you will allow no one else to injure them?"

"We swear! We swear!"

"On your honour and on your escutcheon?"

"On our honour and on our escutcheon!"

"And on the cross?"

"And on the cross!"

"God has heard it!" said Macko. "Amen!" And he took a deep breath, for he knew that such an oath they would keep.

Macko wished to depart at once, but they detained him almost by force. They compelled him to drink, and presently all became quite familiar. Young Wilk, who was usually quarrelsome in his cups, now vented his threats only on Cztan, while he curried favour with Macko, as if he expected to receive Jagienka from him next day. But before midnight he fell asleep, and could not be roused. The old man soon followed his son's example, and at length Macko left them at table as if dead. But he, having a very strong head, was only a little merry, and as he returned home he meditated joyfully upon all he had accomplished.

"Well," he said to himself, "Bogdaniec is safe and Zgorzelice is safe as well. They will be enraged by Jagienka's departure, but they will take care of our property. When I return old Wilk will assuredly challenge me, but I do not care."

It occurred to him for a moment that the girl would really be safe if she remained at home, for both the Wilks would guard her as the apple of their eye. But the thought of Cztan, and the fighting which might ensue because of him, made him conclude that she would be better for a time with the rich abbot. Macko had hopes that Zbyszko would yet return a widower, and that he would be drawn by God's will towards Jagienka.

With such thoughts the way home seemed short. Yet the night was advanced when he reached Bogdaniec, and he wondered to see the windows lighted up.

"Are there guests?" he asked of the groom as he dismounted.

"It is the young master of Zgorzelice, with the Bohemian," answered the groom.

The visit astonished Macko, for Jagienka had promised to come next day before daybreak, and they were to set out at once. Why, then, had Jasko come, and so late at night? The old knight imagined that something might have happened, and entered the house with uneasiness.

In the chamber the fire burned merrily, and by the light of the two torches Macko saw Jasko, Hlawa the Bohemian, and another stripling with a face as rosy as an apple.

"How are you, Jasko? And how is Jagienka?" asked the old man.

"Jagienka," answered the lad, "has altered her mind, and prefers to remain at home."

"By heaven! What is this? What has entered her head now?"

Instead of answering, the lad raised his blue eyes towards him and burst out laughing.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Macko.

The Bohemian and the other lad now broke into a merry laugh also.

"You see!" exclaimed the supposed Jasko. "Who will recognise me if you do not?"

"In the name of the Father and Son!" exclaimed Macko, looking more closely at the sprightly figure before him. "And what do you do here, my glow-worm?"

"Why," answered Jagienka, "those about to travel must be early astir."

"But you were to have come to-morrow at daybreak."

"To-morrow at daybreak! So that all may see me! To-morrow they will think I am on a visit to you, and they will say nothing until the following day. Sieciechowa and Jasko know, but Jasko has sworn to say nothing until they begin to grow alarmed. So you did not recognise me—even you?"

In his turn, Macko now began to laugh. On her head Jagienka had a red silk hood-net, and she wore a green cloth coat, trousers ample at the thighs and tight about the legs, one of which was red like the hood-net, and the other of vertical coloured stripes. At her side hung a fine sword. As she smiled, her face bright as the morning dawn, she looked so beautiful that it was impossible to take one's eyes from her.

"By heaven!" exclaimed Macko. "Is it some wondrous damsel, or some lovely little flower?"

Hereupon he turned to the other lad.

"And you too?" he asked. "Are you also disguised?"

"This is the daughter of Sieciechowa," answered Jagienka. "It would not be convenient for me to be alone with you, so I have taken Anulka."

Macko then told Jagienka of his visit to the Wilks, and she listened in amazement. When at length he had finished she said:

"The Lord Jesus granted you no scant measure of cunning, and I believe that everything must always be according to your wishes."

"Ah, my child!" he said, sadly shaking his head. "If all were as I wish, you would long ago have been mistress of Bogdaniec!"

Jagienka looked at him for a long time with her blue eyes, and then, approaching him, she kissed his hand.

"Why do you kiss my hand?" asked the old man.

"It is nothing," she answered. "I will only say 'Good-night,' for it is late, and to-morrow we must start before daybreak."

And taking Anulka with her, Jagienka went off, and Macko led the Bohemian to a sleeping chamber, where, throwing themselves down on bison's skins, they soon fell into a sound and refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XLIII.

JAGIENKA, whose whole life had been passed between Zgorzelice and Krzesnia, was beside herself with astonishment at the sight of Sieradz, with its walls, towers, town hall, and churches. And when the old knight assured her that Sieradz was as little to be compared with Krakow as a firebrand to the sun, she could not believe her ears.

In the cloister they were welcomed by the same decrepit prior who had received Zbyszko. The news concerning the abbot saddened them greatly. He had lived in the cloister for a long time, but two weeks previously he had set out to see his friend, the Bishop of Plock. He had been continually ill. In the evenings he used to become distracted in mind, demanding that they should put on his armour, so that he might challenge Prince Jan of Raciborz to a fight. It was with difficulty that he could be kept in bed. But two weeks before he had completely recovered his wits, and, brooking no opposition, he had ordered them to drive him to Plock forthwith, as he wished to receive the sacraments from the hands of the bishop, and to deposit with him his last testament.

This news gave Macko great anxiety, and he went off to consult with Jagienka, who had meanwhile learned from Hlawa of the abbot's departure.

"What is to be done?" he asked; "and what are we to do with you?"

"We shall go to Plock, and I with you," she answered at once.

"So you have already spoken with the Bohemian?" he asked.

"Assuredly, and he thinks that if his master has got into any trouble in Marienburg, it will be possible to do much for him by means of the Princess Alexandra of Plock, for she is the King's daughter, and a friend of the Knights of the Cross."

"True, so help me God!" exclaimed Macko. "And if she should give us a letter to the Grand Master we could ride safely through the whole territory of the Order. They like her, indeed, and she likes them. It is good advice, and this Bohemian is no fool!"

"To be sure, he is not!" cried Anulka, suddenly raising her bright blue eyes with enthusiasm.

"Indeed!" said Macko, addressing her. "And what is this to you?"

At these words the girl grew greatly confused, and, lowering her long eyelashes, she blushed like a rose.

Next day, after bidding the old prior farewell, they set out on their further journey. The snow had meanwhile thawed, and the streams were swollen, and they rode with greater difficulty than before. They inquired for the abbot as they proceeded, and it was easy to follow his steps, as they found many manors, parsonages, and inns at which he had stopped. Everywhere he had distributed magnificent alms, and many expressed apprehensions that he was not far from eternal salvation. In some places he had been forced by excessive weakness to remain two or three days, so it seemed to Macko probable that they should overtake him.

But he was wrong, for they were detained first by the swollen waters of the Ner and Bzura. Before reaching Leczyca they had to remain four days in an empty inn, which its owner had abandoned because of the impending flood. Wit, Macko's groom, was a native of the district, and had heard something of a way through the forest, but he would not undertake their guidance for fear of evil spirits—especially the mighty forest-devil Boruta, who led people into bottomless swamps, and afterwards rescued them at the cost of their souls.

Macko, having heard that Boruta's favour might be obtained by an offering of drink, hung out on the fence, with his own hands, a large ox-bladder of mead, and next day it appeared to have been drunk to the bottom. The Bohemian smiled when he was told of it, but Macko felt reassured, and now hoped that they would be able to cross the swamps without mishap.

As Wit declared that he would rather be killed than try to find the path through the forest, Hlawa, being naturally venturesome and anxious to show his bravery before people, and especially before women, took an axe in his

girdle and a cudgel in his hand, and set out. He went before daybreak, and hoped to return by noon. When noon came and he did not return, they began to be alarmed. Wit declared that if he did return it would be in the shape of a were-wolf. Macko was uneasy; Jagienka turned towards the forest, and made the sign of the cross; and Anulka, after looking vainly for an apron to cover her eyes, covered them instead with her fingers, beneath which her tears fell down one after another.

But in the evening, towards sunset, the Bohemian returned, and not alone. He had with him some human figure, which he drove before him attached to a rope. All rushed joyfully towards Hlawa, but became silent at the sight of the figure, which was small, crooked-legged, thick-bearded, black, and dressed in wolf-skins.

"In the name of heaven! What monster do you bring here?" asked Macko.

"He says he is a man and a pitch-burner," answered Hlawa, "but whether it is so, I know not."

"He is no man! He is no man!" cried Wit.

But Macko ordered him to be silent, and, after closely scrutinising the captive, exclaimed:

"Cross yourself! Cross yourself at once!"

"Jesus Christ be praised!" the man exclaimed, instantly making the sign of the cross. He breathed more freely, and looked upon those present with greater confidence.

"Jesus Christ be praised!" he repeated. "I did not know whether I was in the hands of Christians or devils. O Jesus!"

"Do not fear," said Macko; "you are among Christians, who love to hear mass. Who are you?"

"I am a pitch-burner, lord—a cottager. There are seven of us here in huts, with our women and children."

"How far is it from here?"

"Less than ten furlongs."

"How do you get to the town?"

"We have our road behind the Devil's pit."

"The Devil's pit! Cross yourself once more!"

"In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen!"

"Good! Can a waggon pass that way!"

"Just now it is quaggy everywhere, but in the pit the wind dries the mud. It is difficult, but a man who knows the forest well could conduct the waggon to the huts."

"Will you lead us for a skojec—or, let us say, two?"

The pitch-burner undertook the task willingly, and they arranged to set out next morning.

Jagienka now laughed, because they had thought the pitch-burner a forest monster, and Anulka laughed also.

"Your eyes are not yet dry after weeping for Hlawa," said Macko to Anulka, "and you laugh already!"

The Bohemian looked at her rosy face, and, seeing that her eyelashes were indeed wet, he said:

"Did you weep for me?"

"Indeed, no!" answered the girl; "I was only frightened."

"But you are a gentlewoman, and it is shame for a gentlewoman to be afraid. Your mistress is less timid. What evil could happen to you here, during daylight, and with people by you?"

"To me, nothing; but to you——"

"But you say you did not weep for me?"

"In truth, it was not for you."

"Why then!"

"From fear."

"And now you have no fear?"

"I have not."

"And why?"

"Because you have come back."

Hlawa glanced at her gratefully, smiled, and said:

"We might dispute in this way until morning, you are so artful."

"Do not laugh at me!" said Anulka in a low voice.

And, forsooth, Anulka might have been suspected of anything rather than artfulness. Hlawa himself had perceived that she was becoming more attached to him every day. He loved Jagienka, but as a subject might love a king's daughter—with all humility and worship, but without hope. During the journey old Macko used to ride in front with Jagienka, while he followed with Anulka. Hlawa, therefore, could not but be struck with the girl's brightness and beauty, upon which he had, indeed, begun to look more and more covetously. Once, when they had tarried a little behind with the pack-horses, he suddenly turned to her and said:

"Do you know? As I ride beside you I am like a wolf beside a lamb."

She laughed merrily, and her white teeth glittered.

"Would you eat me, then?" she asked.

"I would! Flesh and bones!"

And he looked at her so that she blushed beneath his glances. Then there was silence between them; only their hearts beat violently—his with passion and hers with a sweet dizzy fear.

This evening, as he saw her cheeks and eyelashes wet with tears, his heart softened, and he grew at once more timid and more attentive towards her. At supper he still rallied her a little for her faint-heartedness, but his manner was different from before, and he waited on her as a knight's groom ought to wait upon a gentlewoman. Macko observed this, and praised Hlawa for his worthy manners, which, he remarked, the Bohemian had doubtless acquired in Zbyszko's service at the Mazovian Court.

"Yes," he added, turning to Jagienka, "Zbyszko knows how to behave even at the King's Court."

After supper, when it was time to separate for the night, Hlawa, having first kissed Jagienka's hand, raised to his lips Anulka's hand also, and said:

"You need have no fear for my sake, and I will allow no one to harm you."

The men slept in the front chamber, and Jagienka and Anulka slept together in a small room fitted with a large bedstead made of boards.

Neither of the girls could sleep at once, Anulka being especially restless. Presently Jagienka drew her head nearer to Anulka, and whispered:

"Anulka!"

"What?"

"You like that Bohemian very much—is it not so?"

Anulka made no answer, and Jagienka once more whispered:

"Indeed—I understand it well! Tell me!"

Again Anulka made no reply, but merely touched her mistress's cheek with her lips, and began kissing her incessantly.

As she did so Jagienka sighed again and again.

"Yes—I understand! I do understand!" she whispered in such a low voice that Anulka was scarcely able to catch her words.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE next day was windy, and as the clouds, which had gathered during the wet, misty night, were driven in successive masses across the sun, the day was alternately bright and gloomy. Macko had given orders that the party should start at dawn. The pitch-burner, who was to guide them, said that the horses would be able to pass everywhere, but that it would be necessary, in certain places, to take the waggons to pieces and carry them in parts, as well as the carts containing the accoutrements and provisions.

Immediately after leaving the inn they entered a forest of tall pines. Beyond the pine forest was a wood containing brushwood and thicket, and here they were compelled to take the waggons to pieces. The wheels, poles, and fore parts, as well as the baggage and provisions, were carried by the strong servants on their shoulders. This difficult part extended for three furlongs, but still they reached the huts towards evening. The pitch-burners received them hospitably, and assured them that they could reach the town by going through the Devil's pit, or, rather, along by it. Although the dwellers in this desert seldom saw bread or flour they never suffered hunger, for they had plenty of meat of all kinds, and especially smoked mud-fish, which swarmed in the marshes. They treated their guests liberally, therefore, but stretched out their hands greedily for oaten cakes. There were women and children among them, all black with the pitch smoke. There was one old peasant who remembered the massacre of Leczyca in 1331, and the complete devastation of the town by the Knights of the Cross.

Although they had heard almost the same tale from the prior, Macko, the Bohemian, and both the girls listened with the greatest interest to the story of the old man, as he sat at the hearth and stirred the fire as if raking

out the terrible memories of his youth. In Leczyca, as well as in Sieradz, they did not spare even the church and the priests, and the blood of aged women and young children dripped from the knives of the conquerors.

The Knights of the Cross! Always the Knights of the Cross! The thoughts of Macko and Jagienka turned at once to Zbyszko, who was even then—as in a wolf's jaw—among that hostile people who knew neither pity nor laws of hospitality. The heart of Anulka grew faint also, for she did not know whether they should not fall among these cruel men while trying to overtake the abbot.

The old man next told of the Battle of Plowce, which put an end to the Teutonic invasion. As a lad in the infantry levied by the peasants, he had taken part in the fight, armed with an iron flail. It was in this battle that nearly the whole Grady family had perished, and Macko therefore knew all the details. Yet he listened now, as if he had never before heard it, to the story of the terrible defeat of the Germans, who, before the swords of the Polish knights and the might of King Lokietek, had been swept down like cornfields before the wind.

"Yes, I can remember it," said the old man. "They invaded this country, burnt down towns and castles, and even slaughtered children in their cradles. But a terrible end awaited them. Yes, it was a worthy fight! As I close my eyes I can see the battlefield now."

He closed his eyes and was silent, only stirring the coals on the hearth slowly, so that Jagienka grew impatient for the rest of his story.

"What was it like?" she asked presently.

"What was it like?" repeated the old man. "I can see the field as if I were looking at it now. There was much brushwood, and on the right a swamp and some stubble—a small field. But after the battle there was neither brushwood, nor swamp, nor stubble, but only iron everywhere—swords and axes, pikes and splendid armour in heaps, as if someone had covered the ground with them. I have never seen so many slain men on one spot, and so much human blood flowing."

After passing a part of the night in talk, the guests were given beds of moss, soft as down, and covered with warm skins. After enjoying a refreshing sleep they again set out in the morning as soon as it was light. The path by the pit was tolerable, and they came within sight of the castle of Leczyca before nightfall.

At the cloister of the Dominicans they obtained news of the abbot. He had been there, and had felt so much better that he hoped for a complete recovery. Some days before, therefore, he had continued his journey. Macko did not now think it so necessary to overtake the abbot, for he had already decided to take the maids to Plock. But, as he desired to reach Zbyszko, he was much perplexed to learn that, since the abbot's departure, the rivers had been so much swollen that further progress was impossible. The Dominicans entertained the party hospitably, and presented Macko with a tablet of olive wood, inscribed with a prayer in Latin to the angel Raphael, the patron saint of travellers.

The forced sojourn in Leczyca lasted a fortnight. During it one of the burgomasters discovered that the boys in the knight's party were girls, and immediately fell in love with Jagienka. The Bohemian wished to challenge him to fight forthwith, but as it was the eve of their departure Macko succeeded in dissuading him.

After travelling sixteen days they at length reached the gates of Plock. It was night when they arrived, and the gates were already shut. They were therefore compelled to pass the night at a weaver's house beside the wall. In the morning Macko rose as soon as the gates were opened, but he did not rouse the two girls, who were much fatigued with the hardships of the road. On entering the town he proceeded to the cathedral, where the first news he heard was that the abbot had died a week before. Although he had been dead a week, they had celebrated masses beside the coffin and had held funeral feasts every day since his death. The funeral itself was to take place that day, as well as the last banquet in honour of the deceased. Macko's sorrow was great, and, without even surveying the town, he returned with all speed to the weaver's house.

"Well, he is dead," he said to himself, "and may the eternal light shine upon him! There is no help for it in this world. But what am I to do now with those girls?"

He pondered whether he had better leave them with the Princess Alexandra or with the Princess Anna Danuta, or whether he ought to take them to Spychow. If Danusia no longer lived it would be well, he thought, that Jagienka should be near Zbyszko. He remembered how his nephew, when bent upon going away to Mazovia, had yet longed to be by Jagienka's side. But Macko was also concerned

about the abbot's estate. He had been angry with him and Zbyszko, and had declared that he would leave them nothing. Yet he might have repented before his death. That he had bequeathed Jagienka something was certain, for he had said so many a time; therefore, through her the estate might as well not be lost to Zbyszko. But presently he suppressed all such thoughts. "I might," he reflected, "exert myself here for the sake of the estate, but perhaps Zbyszko is even now stretching out his hands towards me from some German dungeon." He felt that he must leave Jagienka under the care of the Princess and the bishop, although that plan by no means satisfied him. The girl had already a worthy dowry, and if she should inherit from the abbot also, some Mazovian would be certain to take her, for she herself would not be disposed to remain unwedded longer.

This reflection alarmed Macko, but at length he resolved that he would seek out Zbyszko, and, if necessary, leave Jagienka either at Spychow or with the Princess Danuta, but not in Plock, where the Court was much more splendid and there were many handsome knights. Burdened with these thoughts, he returned to the weaver's house to break the news of the abbot's death to Jagienka.

He found both girls dressed and as merry as birds. He sat down on a bench, and told the weaver's apprentice to bring him a jug of warm ale. Then, assuming an unusually gloomy expression, he said:

"Do you hear the bell ringing in the town? Guess for whose memory they ring, for to-day is not Sunday, and during matins you were asleep. Do you wish to see the abbot?"

"To be sure I do!" exclaimed Jagienka.

"Well, you cannot see him."

"Has he travelled on farther?"

"He has indeed! Do you not hear the bell?"

"Is he dead?" cried Jagienka.

"Let us pray for his soul!"

Both girls knelt down, along with Macko, and recited the prayers for the dead in their clear mellow voices. Tears flowed down Jagienka's face, for she had loved the abbot dearly, who, although often harsh, had never injured anyone, but had done good with both hands, and had loved her, his god-child, as a daughter. When they had partially eased their sorrow with tears, Macko took the girls, with the Bohemian, to the funeral service.

The funeral was magnificent. The procession was headed by the Bishop Jacob of Kurdwanow, and all the priests and monks from the monasteries in Plock were present. Speeches were spoken, which, being in Latin, none but the clergy understood, and then both clergy and laity returned to a copious banquet. Being a relative of the deceased and an acquaintance of the bishop's, Macko attended the banquet, accompanied by his two esquires. The bishop greeted him in the most friendly fashion, and said, almost immediately afterwards:

"There are some forests bequeathed to the Gradys of Bogdaniec, but everything else not given to cloisters or the abbey is to belong to his god-child, a certain Jagienka of Zgorzelice."

Macko, who had not expected much, was glad of the forests. The bishop did not observe that at the mention of Jagienka of Zgorzelice one of the knight's esquires lifted a pair of blue eyes and said:

"God bless him! But I should prefer him alive."

"Be silent!" exclaimed Macko, turning round angrily. "Be silent, or you will be discovered!"

Suddenly he stopped, a look of astonishment in his eyes. His face turned fierce and wolf-like as, at a little distance off, by the door through which the Princess Alexandra had just entered, he saw Kuno von Lichtenstein, at whose hands Zbyszko had nearly perished in Krakow. Jagienka had never in her life seen Macko as he now was. His face was drawn like the jaw of an angry dog, and his teeth glistened threateningly beneath his moustache. Hastily turning his girdle, he started towards the hated Knight of the Cross.

Midway he paused and stroked his beard with his big hand. He reflected just in time that Lichtenstein might be at the Court of Plock not merely as a guest, but as an envoy, and that if he should strike him without first making inquiry he would be acting precisely as Zbyszko had done on the way from Tyniec.

He therefore mastered his passion, turned round his girdle again, composed his expression, and waited a little. Then, when the Princess, having greeted Lichtenstein, began to speak with the bishop, he approached her, and, bowing low, reminded her who he was, saying that he regarded her as his benefactress because of the letter with which she had formerly furnished him.

The Princess scarcely remembered his face, but she easily remembered the letter and the whole affair. She had heard about Jurand and the imprisonment of his daughter, as well as about Zbyszko's marriage and his combat with Rotgier. The Knights of the Cross were not hated by her as they were hated by Anna Danuta, the wife of Prince Janusz, but in this case her heart was on the side of the lovers. She was glad, therefore, to have someone who could inform her precisely concerning the course of events.

Macko, who was resolved to secure, at any cost, the protection of the powerful Princess, saw with what interest she listened to his tale of the unhappy fate of Zbyszko and Danusia. She was, indeed, moved almost to tears.

"I have never in my life heard of anything so piteous," she said at length. "Do you think that it was done by the Knights of the Cross? For here we were told of robbers who deceived the Knights by delivering to them some other maid. We also heard of Jurand's letter——"

"All this has been already decided, not by human judgment, but by God's. Rotgier was a great knight, yet he has perished at the hands of a boy!"

"Such a boy," said the Princess, smiling, "as it is best not to meddle with!"

"But Danusia! And Jurand!" exclaimed Macko. "Where are they? God knows, too, whether something did not befall Zbyszko when he went to Marienburg."

"No hurt could befall him in Marienburg with the Grand Master and his brother Ulrich, who is a chivalrous man. Moreover he had assuredly letters from Prince Janusz. Unless he challenged some knight and was slain in combat——"

"Of that I have small fear," answered the old knight. "Unless they throw him into some dungeon, or slay him by treachery, while he has a weapon by him I do not greatly fear. Besides, there is but one man whom he would certainly challenge—whom I too have vowed to challenge—and that man is here now."

As he spoke he glanced towards Lichtenstein, who was then speaking with the Palatine of Plock. The Princess knit her brows.

"Whether you have vowed to fight with him or not," she said severely, "remember that he is a guest, and that

whoever would be our guest must conduct himself as is seemly."

"I know it, your Highness," said Macko. "Indeed, I had already turned my girdle and was about to approach him, but I restrained myself, thinking that he might be an envoy."

"He is an envoy. He is, moreover, a man of great importance among his own people, and even the Grand Master himself will hardly refuse him anything. God willed, perhaps, that he should not have been in Marienburg during the stay of your nephew, for Lichtenstein, though of high birth, is, they say, malignant and vengeful. Has he recognised you?"

"He cannot well recognise me, for he has seen me but little. On the road from Tyniec we wore our helms, and afterwards I was only once with him, touching Zbyszko's affair, and that was in the evening and only for a few moments. Zbyszko he would certainly recognise, but me he has forgotten; and as for my vows, he may never have heard of them at all, having better to think about."

"How so? Better?"

"I have heard that Zawisza of Garbow, and Powala of Taczew, and Marcin of Wrocimowice, and Pasko Zlodziej, and Lis of Targowisko did also vow to fight with him. Every one of these could cope with ten such men as Lichtenstein. Better that he had never been born than have even one of their swords hanging over his head. Still, I will not only refrain from mentioning my vow, but will even endeavour to make friends with him."

"Why should you do so?"

Macko's face assumed a look of cunning, like that of a fox.

"That I may obtain from him a letter with which I may ride in safety through the Teutonic lands, and rescue Zbyszko should he be in need."

"And is this consistent with chivalrous honour?" asked the Princess, with a smile.

"It is," said Macko. "In time of peace no knight would be ashamed of getting the better of his enemy by means of a ruse."

"Then I will introduce you to him," replied the Princess, beckoning to Lichtenstein.

Lichtenstein did not recognise Macko. He bowed proudly, but his face brightened when he saw the two

richly clad grooms in attendance on the knight, for he knew that their master could be no mean person.

"This knight is riding to Marienburg," said the Princess, "and I myself have recommended him to the Grand Master's favour. But he has heard of the esteem in which you are held by the Order, and is anxious to have a letter from your hand as well."

So saying, she left them and went to speak to the bishop. Lichtenstein fixed his cold grey eyes on Macko, and asked:

"What reason have you, Pan, for visiting our pious and modest capital?"

"An honest and pious reason," answered Macko, raising his eyes. "Were it otherwise, her Highness would not stand warrant in my favour. But apart from pious vows, I desire also to know your Master, who makes peace on earth, and is the most famous knight in the world."

"Whomsoever her Highness recommends will never complain of our hospitality," said Lichtenstein. "But as to the Master, you will hardly see him, for a month ago he went to Danzig, whence he was to proceed to Königsberg and then to the frontier, for though he is a lover of peace he must, nevertheless, defend the Order's dominions against the treacherous violence of Witold."

On hearing this, Macko was so manifestly disappointed that Lichtenstein, whose eyes nothing escaped, said:

"I see that you are as desirous of knowing the Grand Master as of accomplishing your monastic vows."

"Indeed, I am!" answered Macko hastily. "Then the war against Witold concerning Samogitia is already certain?"

"He began it himself, by helping the rebels contrary to his oaths."

"Well," said Macko, after a pause, "may God grant the Order success such as it deserves! I cannot now see the Master, but I shall at least accomplish my vows."

Nevertheless, he did not himself know what he ought now to do, and with a feeling of affliction in his soul he thought of Zbyszko, continually asking himself where he should seek him and whether he should find him.

CHAPTER XLV.

It was easy to see that if the Grand Master had left Marienburg and gone to war it would be unnecessary to seek Zbyszko there, and that more exact information concerning his whereabouts must be obtained. Macko therefore determined to lose no time, but to pursue his journey next day. To obtain a letter from Lichtenstein through the influence of the Princess Alexandra, in whom the Komthur had perfect confidence, was an easy matter. Macko thus obtained a letter of recommendation to the burgomaster of Brodnica and to the Grand Master in Marienburg, bestowing upon Lichtenstein in return a large silver tumbler, forged in Breslau. This liberality astonished the Bohemian not a little.

"I have vowed to fight him some day," said Macko, "but I have done this because it would not now be seemly to seek the life of a man who has done me a service. With us it is not customary to strike a benefactor."

"Yet it is a pity," said Hlawa, somewhat sarcastically, "for it is a worthy tumbler!"

"Do not fear!" answered Macko. "I do nothing without premeditation. If our merciful Lord will but allow me to slay this German, then I shall win the tumbler back again, and much else besides."

Macko, thinking of the abbot's will, which had been deposited with the bishop, now resolved that Jagienka and Anulka must be left in Plock in the Princess Alexandra's care. The girl, however, opposed this proposal with all the strength of her inflexible will. If, she said, it appeared that they must be left somewhere on the way, then it ought to be with the Princess Anna, because the Knights of the Cross were less loved at the Court of Ciechanow, while Zbyszko was loved more. As Macko did not yield completely, Jagienka drew him aside from the others, and spoke to him with tears in her eyes.

"God sees my heart," she said, "and He knows that I pray every morning and evening for Danusia and for Zbyszko's happiness! But you and Hlawa say that she has already perished, and will never come out of the Teutons' hands alive. If it must be so, then I——"

She hesitated. The tears which had risen to her eyes rolled slowly down her cheeks, and in a low voice she concluded:

"Then I would be near Zbyszko!"

Although Macko was moved, he answered:

"If the girl should perish, Zbyszko will not even look upon you, because of his sorrow."

"I do not wish him to look on me. I would only be by his side."

"You know that your wishes are as mine, but in the first flood of his grief he might even insult you."

"Let him even insult me," she answered, smiling sadly; "but he will not do so, for he will not know me."

"He will recognise you."

"He will not. Even you did not recognise me. You shall tell him that I am Jasko, for Jasko's face is quite like mine. You shall say that Jasko is grown up, and it will never enter his mind that I am anyone but Jasko."

After once more saying something concerning "knees bent in towards each other," Macko reluctantly yielded, and they began to discuss the journey. Macko resolved to set out for Teutonic territory, to reach Brodnica, and learn whether the Grand Master was—contrary to Lichtenstein's expectation—still in Marienburg.

Next day they started, and ten days later they crossed the frontier and reached Brodnica. The town was a pleasant one, but at the very entrance signs of the German rule could be seen. Outside the town, on the road to Gorezenica, rose a gigantic gallows built of stone, and on it hung several corpses, one of which was a woman's. On the watch-tower and over the castle floated a flag bearing a red hand on a white ground. The travellers, however, did not find the Komthur himself in the town, as he had gone with a portion of the garrison and the local nobility to Marienburg. This information was given Macko by an old Knight of the Cross, blind in both eyes, who had formerly been the Komthur of Brodnica. He knew the Polish language, and received Macko hospitably on having the contents of Lichtenstein's letter

read to him by the chaplain. Six weeks before he, being an experienced knight, had been summoned to Marienburg to a council of war. He had heard, he said in reply to Macko's questions, of some young Polish knight who had excited surprise by his success at the tournaments, but he could not remember his name. Ulrich von Jungingen, the Grand Master's brother, had taken a great liking to the youthful knight, and had given him safe conducts, with which, he believed, he had travelled towards the East.

This news overjoyed Macko, for he had no doubt that the young knight was Zbyszko. He decided that there was no need to go to Marienburg for the present, as no one there would be likely to know precisely where his nephew then was. He himself surmised that Zbyszko was watching the neighbourhood of Szczytno, or making inquiries at some of the remoter eastern castles and commanderies.

They therefore set out without delay through the Teutonic country, eastward to Szczytno. The corn grew green in the fields; flowers covered the meadows; the pine trees exhaled their resinous perfume. On reaching Niedzborz they turned towards Szczytno.

Their guide rode a few score paces in front, Macko followed with Jagienka, and Hlawka and Anulka came next at a tolerably long interval, while the waggons, surrounded by the armed domestics, brought up the rear. It was early morning, and the rosy hue of sunrise had not yet left the eastern sky, although the sun was already shining, transforming the dewdrops on the trees and herbs into opals.

"Are you not afraid to go to Szczytno?" asked Macko.

"I am not," answered Jagienka. "God will protect me, for I am an orphan."

"There they do not keep faith. The worst of the hounds was Danveld, whom Jurand slew with Gotfried. So the Bohemian relates. The next worst was Rotgier, who fell beneath Zbyszko's axe. The old man who is still left is cruel also, and has sold his soul to Satan. If Danusia has perished, then be sure it was by his hand. It is with him that we shall have to deal in Szczytno."

"And this old man—what is his name?"

"Siegfried von Loewe."

"God will help us to deal successfully with him also."

"God grant it!"

Presently their conversation was interrupted by the guide suddenly stopping in front. He wheeled round his stallion, and came riding at full speed towards Macko.

"Look, Pan!" he cried in a frightened voice. "Who is that coming down the hill towards us?"

"Who? Where?" asked Macko.

"There! Is it not a giant?"

Macko and Jagienka stopped their horses, and, looking in the direction pointed out by the guide, beheld on the brow of the hill, about half a furlong away, a figure whose proportions seemed to surpass those of any human form.

"He speaks truly; he is a big fellow!" muttered Macko.

He frowned, spat suddenly aside, and said:

"Let the spell fall upon the dog!"

"Do you conjure some evil thing?" asked Jagienka.

"It was on such a morning as this that Zbyszko and I saw on the road from Tyniec to Krakow a figure like a giant. They said it was Walgierz Wdaly, but it proved to be the Pan of Taczew. Yet no good came of that meeting. Let the spell fall upon the dog!"

"It is no knight, for he walks on foot," said Jagienka, straining her eyes. "I can see that he is unarmed, and carries only a staff in his hand."

"He gropes his way as if it were night," added Macko.

"And he moves very slowly. Surely he must be blind."

"He is blind—assuredly he is blind."

They urged on their horses, and presently stopped beside the old man, who descended the hill slowly, feeling his way before him with his staff. He was indeed an enormous man, although, seen close at hand, he ceased to seem a giant. As they had imagined, he was quite blind. Where his eyes had been there were now only two red cavities. His right hand was also wanting, in its place being a bandage made of a dirty rag. His white hair fell down over his shoulders, and his beard fell to his girdle.

"Poor wretch!" exclaimed Jagienka. "He has not even a dog to lead him. We cannot leave him unaided. I do not know whether he will understand me, but I will speak to him in our language."

She sprang from her horse, and, approaching the old man, sought in a leather pouch at her girdle for money. Hearing the stamping of horses and the sound of voices beside him, the wayfarer stretched out his staff and raised his face upwards as blind people do.

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" said the girl. "Do you understand our Christian tongue?"

At the sound of her clear young voice he shuddered, and a strange light flashed across his face as if produced by some emotion. He covered his empty sockets with his eyelids, and suddenly casting his staff away, fell on his knees before her with outstretched arms.

"Rise!" said the girl astonished. "I will help you without your kneeling. What ails you?"

He made no reply. Only two tears rolled down his cheeks, and from his lips came a sound resembling a moan:

"Ah!—ah!"

"For God's mercy! Are you dumb?"

"Ah!—ah!"

As he uttered this cry he raised his hand. With it he made the sign of the cross, and then passed it across his mouth. Jagienka could not understand, and looked towards Macko, who exclaimed:

"He is surely trying to show us that his tongue has been cut out!"

"Has your tongue been cut out?" asked the girl.

"Ah!—ah!—ah!—ah!" repeated the old man, nodding his head as he spoke.

He placed his fingers against his eyelids, then, stretching out his right arm without its hand, he made with the left hand a movement to express the act of cutting. Both now understood him.

"Who has done this to you?" asked Jagienka.

In answer, the old man again made the sign of the cross in the air.

"The Knights of the Cross," exclaimed Macko.

The dumb man let his head fall upon his breast in confirmation.

There was a moment of silence, Macko and Jagienka exchanging uneasy glances, for here before their eyes they had proof of the Order's mercilessness.

"A cruel Order!" said Macko at length. "They have punished him harshly, and God only knows whether deservedly. We shall never learn. Would that we knew where to lead him, for he must belong to this country. He seems to understand our language, however."

"Do you understand what we say?" asked Jagienka.

The old man nodded his head affirmatively.

"Are you a native of this country?"

He shook his head.

"Of Mazovia?"

He nodded.

"A subject of Prince Janusz?"

The gesture was repeated.

"What took you to the country of the Knights of the Cross?"

The old man did not know how to answer this question, but his face instantly assumed an expression of such overwhelming grief that Jagienka's compassionate heart throbbed with pity, and even Macko, who was not easily moved, exclaimed indignantly:

"Doubtless the hounds have injured him unjustly!"

Jagienka slipped some pieces of money into the poor wretch's hand.

"Listen!" she said. "We shall not leave you. You shall ride with us to Mazovia, and we shall ask in every village whether you belong to it. Somehow, no doubt, we shall divine each other's meaning. But rise up now, for indeed we are no saints!"

But he did not rise. On the contrary, he stooped and embraced her feet. But as he did so a look as of disappointment flashed across his face. By her voice he had believed his questioner to be a girl, and now his hand had touched shoes of heifer-skin such as are worn by knights and grooms when travelling.

"Our waggons will arrive presently," she continued, "and then you will have rest and refreshment. But you will not be able to go at once to Mazovia, for we must first go to Szczytno."

At these words the old man leaped to his feet, horror and amazement being reflected on his face. He stretched out his arms as if to bar their way, and from his mouth came wild sounds as if of dismay.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Jagienka in terror.

But the Bohemian, who had already arrived along with Anulka, and had been carefully examining the old man for some time, suddenly addressed Macko.

"By God's wounds!" he exclaimed in a strange voice. "Permit me, Pan, to speak to him, for you do not imagine who he may be."

Without waiting for permission, he approached the wayfarer, and placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Do you come from Szczytno!" he asked.

The old man became calmer, as if struck by the sound of Hlawa's voice, and nodded his head.

"Were you not seeking your child there?"

A hollow groan was the only answer.

Hlawa turned pale. After scrutinising the old man's features even more closely than before, he said slowly and distinctly:

"Then you are Jurand of Spychow?"

"Jurand!" exclaimed Macko.

But Jurand himself had staggered and swooned. The tortures he had suffered, his want of food, and the hardships of his journey, had utterly shattered him. For ten days he had been groping blindly about the roads, losing his way, unable to tell where he was going, and unable to ask for direction. But now that he had met compassionate hearts, and heard the speech of his own country, and one voice which reminded him of his daughter's; now that he heard himself called by name, his heart was wrung within him, thoughts sped through his brain like a whirlwind, and, but for the strong arms of the Bohemian to stay him, he would have fallen on the highway with his face in the dust.

Macko leaped from his horse and, with the Bohemian's help, carried him to one of the waggons and laid him on the hay. There Jagienka and Anulka revived him with wine. Jurand then fell into a deep sleep, from which he awoke only three days afterwards.

Meanwhile it was decided that they should not at once proceed to Szczytno, but should first take Jurand to Spychow, where he could be properly attended to by his own people. The cavalcade therefore turned towards the Mazovian frontier, and by the way Jagienka constantly approached Jurand's waggon, fearing lest he should die during his sleep.

"From Spychow we must take him to the Prince," said Macko. "He will never condone such an injury to a great knight."

"They will disavow it, Pan," answered Hlawa; "they seized his child by treachery and denied it, and as to the Lord of Spychow they will say he lost his tongue and hand and eyes in some battle."

"True!" said Macko. "They once seized the Prince himself; but he cannot fight them, for he is no match

for them unless our King assist him. They talk constantly of a great war, yet we have not even a little one."

"But Prince Witold has."

"God be praised that he sets them at naught! Ha! Prince Witold is a true prince. Their craft cannot overcome him, for he is more crafty than them all. The hounds once laid hold of him also, and their sword hung over his head, but he slipped through their fingers like a serpent and then bit them in return. Beware of him when he strikes you, but beware of him still more when he fondles you!"

"Does he deal with all thus?"

"Not with all—only with the Knights of the Cross."

On reaching the vicinity of Spychow they found that old Tolima was ruling everything with an iron hand, for on entering the forest they were confronted by two armed men, who, on seeing that they were a small and friendly cavalcade, allowed them to pass, and also conducted them through the swamps and marshes.

At the castle the travellers were received by Tolima and Father Kaleb. With lightning's speed the news spread among the garrison that the Pan had been brought back. But when they saw in what condition he had come from the Teutons' hands, there arose such a storm of anger and threats that if there had been any Knight of the Cross left in Spychow's dungeons no human power could have saved him from a fearful death. Men wished to throw themselves on their horses, ride to the frontier, and seize as many Germans as possible in order to cast their heads at their lord's feet. But Macko bridled their impatience, knowing that the Germans lived only in towns and castles, and that the country people were of the same blood as themselves, although submitting to the superior force of the Teutons. But the turmoil could not rouse Jurand, and he was carried to his chamber and placed upon a bed covered with a bear-skin. The priest, who was Jurand's foster-brother and loved him, remained beside him, and prayed that the Saviour might yet restore the unhappy man's eyes and hand and tongue.

Exhausted by the journey, the travellers went to rest after partaking of an early meal. At noon, however, Macko awoke, and ordered a groom to summon Tolima.

"I am the uncle of your young lord," he said to the old man in the voice of a superior, "and until he returns I will rule in Spychow."

Tolima bowed his grey head, and, placing his hand to his ear, asked :

"Then you, Pan, are the noble Knight of Bogdaniec?"

"I am," answered Macko; "from whom have you heard of me?"

"The young Pan Zbyszko expected you, and asked concerning you."

Macko sprang up, and, forgetting his dignity, exclaimed :

"Is Zbyszko in Spsychow?"

"He was here, Pan. He departed two days ago."

"By heaven! Whence did he come, and whither did he go?"

"He came from Marienburg, and on his way he was in Szczytno. But he did not say whither he went."

"He said nothing about it?"

"Perhaps he spoke to Father Kaleb."

"Ha! By heaven! So we passed one another!" cried Macko, striking his hips with his hands. "Where is Father Kaleb?"

"I will summon him," said Tolima.

But before the priest came Jagienka entered.

"Have you heard?" cried Macko. "Two days ago Zbyszko was here!"

The girl's face changed, and her legs, encased in their tight striped breeches, trembled perceptibly.

"He was here, and has gone?" she asked. "Whither?"

"Yes—two days ago; but whither he has gone—that Father Kaleb may perhaps know."

"We must follow him," she said imperatively.

Presently Father Kaleb entered, thinking that Macko had merely called him to inquire for Jurand.

"He still sleeps," he began.

"I have heard that Zbyszko has been here," interrupted Macko.

"He has; but two days ago he departed."

"Whither?"

"He himself did not know. He went to make search. He rode towards the Samogitian frontier, where the war now is."

"By heaven! Tell me, father, all you know."

"I only know what I heard from him. In Marienburg he gained the protection of the Grand Master's brother, and obtained an order from him enabling him to search all castles."

"For Jurand and Danusia?"

"Yes; but he had been told that Jurand was dead."

"How did he win Ulrich's favour?"

"In a tournament Ulrich's saddle-girth broke, and Zbyszko might easily have unhorsed him; but, seeing the mishap, he threw away his spear, and even supported the staggering knight."

"Ha! Do you hear?" exclaimed Macko, turning to Jagienka. "And because of this Ulrich took a liking to him?"

"He did, and to him Zbyszko told all his sorrows. Thereupon Ulrich, who is mindful of chivalrous honour, brought him before his brother, the Grand Master. Zbyszko also told me that the Knight de Lorche helped him greatly, both with his influence and his testimony. The result was that the Grand Master sternly ordered the Komthur of Szczytno to send to Marienburg at once all his prisoners, not excepting Jurand himself. As to Jurand, the Komthur answered that he had died of his wounds, and was buried in the church of Szczytno. But the others he sent, and among them was the idiot girl, but not Danusia."

"Hlawa spoke of such an idiot girl," said Macko. "When the Princess reminded Rotgier that the Knights of the Cross knew Jurand's daughter and that she was no idiot, he answered: 'It is indeed true, but we thought that she had been changed by evil spirits.'"

"So the Komthur wrote to the Grand Master. He said they had kept the girl, not as a prisoner, but under their protection, having taken her from the robbers, who declared on their oath that she was the changed daughter of Jurand."

"And did the Grand Master believe this?"

"He did not himself know whether to believe or not, but Ulrich prevailed upon his brother to send an officer of the Order with Zbyszko to Szczytno. There they found that the old Komthur had gone eastwards to war against Witold. They ordered the bailiff to open all the dungeons and cellars, but although they searched and searched they found nothing. One of the domestics told Zbyszko that much might be learnt from the chaplain, who alone was able to understand the dumb hangman. But the old Komthur had taken the hangman away with him, and the chaplain had departed to Koenigsberg to an

ecclesiastical *congressus*. They frequently meet there to send complaints against the knights of the Order to the Pope, for poor priests also suffer much at their hands."

"It is strange to me that they did not find Jurand," remarked Macko.

"The old Komthur had set him free before. It was more cruel to release him than merely to cut his throat. They left him nothing but memory and the consciousness of his misery. He may have been sitting by the roadside as Zbyszko passed on horseback without recognising him. He may have heard Zbyszko's voice, yet could not call him. Ah! I cannot help weeping!"

"And what else did Zbyszko say? Where did he go?" asked Macko.

"He said: 'I know that Danusia was in Szczytno, but they have either killed her or carried her away. Old von Loewe has done this, and—so help me heaven!—I will not rest until I get hold of him!' Zbyszko knew about the war, and therefore he went to Prince Witold, believing that with his help he should do more against the Knights of the Cross than with that of the King himself."

"Then we must start at once!" exclaimed Jagienka.

"Be silent!" said Macko, with a significant look. "It is not meet that boys should give advice. It is true that he is nowhere if not with Prince Witold, but it behoves us to know whether he is in quest of anything besides those German heads he vowed to cut off."

"But how can we know?" asked Father Kaleb.

"If the chaplain of Szczytno had already returned from the synod," said Macko, "I would gladly see him. I have letters of Lichtenstein, and I could safely go to Szczytno."

"It was no synod—only a *congressus*, and the chaplain has certainly returned."

"That is well. I will take Hlawka and two grooms with chargers, and go. Meanwhile, Jagienka, you will wait here until my return from Szczytno. I shall not be gone more than three or four days. Before my departure I will ask you, Father Kaleb, for a letter to the chaplain."

"People speak well of the chaplain," said Father Kaleb, "and if anyone knows anything it is assuredly he."

That evening he prepared the letter, and next morning before sunrise old Macko was no longer in Spychow.

CHAPTER XLVI.

WHEN Jurand awoke from his long sleep he found himself in the presence of Father Kaleb. Having forgotten in his sleep all that had happened to him, and not knowing where he was, he began to feel the bedstead and the neighbouring wall. Hereupon Father Kaleb embraced him and wept with emotion.

"I am here, brother Jurand," he said. "You are in Spychow. God has tried you, but you are now among your own people. Pious people brought you back."

Jurand was still dazed, but presently he began rubbing his forehead and head with his left hand, as if to disperse the heavy clouds of sleep that oppressed him.

"Do you hear and understand me?" asked Father Kaleb.

Jurand nodded his head to signify that he did, and then stretched out his hand for the silver crucifix which he had formerly captured from a German knight, took it from the wall, and, after pressing it to his breast and lips, handed it to Father Kaleb.

"I understand, brother," said the priest. "The cross is left to you; but as it has led you out of the land of bondage, so it may yet restore to you all that you have lost."

Jurand pointed his hand upwards as if to denote that only there would all be restored to him. Then the empty sockets of his eyes were again bedewed with tears, and an expression of great pain passed across his troubled face.

Seeing this gesture of sorrow, Father Kaleb understood that Danusia was no longer alive, and he kneeled down by the bedside and said:

"Lord, grant her eternal rest, and may eternal light shine upon her!"

The blind man sat up on the bed, and began tossing his head and waving his hand, as if to stop Father Kaleb,

but before they could come to any understanding old Tolima entered, followed by the garrison of the castle and most of the dependents of Spychow. They embraced his knees, kissed his hands, and wept bitterly and angrily at the sight of the crippled old man who resembled in nothing the awe-inspiring Jurand of former days. At length one named Sucharz, the smith of Spychow and one of the garrison, approached Jurand and embraced his feet.

"We would have set out against Szczytno at once," he said, "but the knight who brought you here forbade it. Permit us to go now, Pan, for we cannot leave this deed unavenged. They did not offend us with impunity before, and they shall not. We will seize Szczytno and shed their dog's blood—so help us God!"

"To Szczytno!" cried a score of voices. "Their blood!"

Faces frowned, eyes gleamed, and teeth gnashed. But presently the outcry was subdued, and all eyes gazed at Jurand.

Jurand's cheeks flushed, as if the old fury and the old lust of battle had enflamed his heart anew. He rose up, and again groped about the wall. They thought that he sought his sword, but instead of it his fingers encountered the crucifix, which Father Kaleb had hung up in its place. He took it again from the wall, and his face grew pale. He turned towards the people, raised the empty sockets of his eyes, and stretched out the crucifix before him.

There was silence. It was already dark outside the chamber. Through the open windows came the twitter of the birds about to roost in the lime trees in the yard. The last red sunrays, as they penetrated the chamber, fell upon the raised crucifix and the white hair of Jurand.

Sucharz, the smith, looked upon Jurand, and then upon his comrades. He looked again, and then, making the sign of the cross, went on tip-toe out of the chamber. The others followed him noiselessly; only in the courtyard did they stop to whisper among themselves.

"Well, what now?" said one.

"Shall we not go?" asked another. "What else can we do?"

"He has not permitted," said a third.

"He leaves the revenge to God," said a fourth. "Apparently his heart too is changed."

And, in truth, his heart was changed.

Meanwhile in the chamber with Jurand there were left only Father Kaleb and old Tolima, with Jagienka and Anulka, who, having seen a band of armed men pass through the courtyard, had come to see what was passing.

"God bless you, Knight Jurand!" said Jagienka, approaching him. "I am one of those who brought you hither from Prussia."

At the sound of her voice his face brightened. Apparently he remembered all that had happened on the Szczytno highway, for he began thanking her by nodding his head and repeatedly placing his hand on his heart. She then related all that had since happened, ending with Macko's departure for Szczytno. At the mention of Szczytno Jurand fell into a frenzy such as had before seized him on the highway. But Jagienka reassured him by telling him of Macko's great craftiness and courage, and of the letters which Lichtenstein had given him to ensure his safety. This news calmed him considerably. It was plain that he would have asked about many other things, but that he was unable. Perceiving this, the girl told him that they must often speak together, and that they would soon understand each other easily. Jurand smiled, and, stretching out his hand, felt for her head, and rested it upon it a long time, as if blessing her.

Jurand gave Father Kaleb and Tolima to understand that he loved having the sprightly lad beside him, and Jagienka, who sincerely pitied him in her heart, often came to see him while she was waiting for Macko's return.

But although Macko was to have returned in three days, the fourth day and the fifth passed, and yet he did not come. On the sixth day Jagienka was on the point of urging Tolima to send out men to seek intelligence, when it was announced from the oak tree, which was used as a watch-tower, that horsemen were approaching. Presently horses' hoofs were heard upon the drawbridge, and Hlawa, accompanied by another groom of Macko's retinue, made his appearance. Jagienka, who had already descended to the courtyard, sprang towards him before he could dismount.

"Where is Macko?" she asked, her heart beating with alarm.

"He has gone to Prince Witold," answered Hlawa; "but he has ordered you to remain here."

CHAPTER XLVII.

For a time Jagienka gazed at the Bohemian with wide-open eyes. He was well aware how disagreeable were the tidings he had brought her.

"But I must tell you what we heard in Szczytno," he said, "for there is much news and important."

"Is there any news of Zbyszko?"

"No; only of the events in Szczytno."

"Let the servant unsaddle the horses, and you—follow me."

So saying, she led Hlawa upstairs with her.

"Why has Macko left us?" she asked. "Why must we remain in Spychow, and why have you come back?"

"I came back," answered Hlawa, "because the Knight Macko ordered me. I would have gone to war, but Macko said, 'Return, look after the Panienka of Zgorzelice, and wait for news of me. It may be,' he said, 'that you shall have to take her back to Zgorzelice, for, of course, she cannot go alone.'"

"By heaven! What then has happened? Is Jurand's daughter found? Has Macko only gone to fetch Zbyszko? Have you seen her? Have you spoken to her? Why have you not brought her, and where is she now?"

"She is not found. But there is good ground for believing that she was in Szczytno, but has been carried off to some eastern castle."

"And why must we stay in Spychow?"

"Well—if she should be found—— Then, you see, Panienka, that—— Then, to be sure, there would be no reason——"

Jagienka was silent, but her cheeks flushed.

"I believed, and I still believe," continued Hlawa, "that we shall not get her alive out of the clutches of those hounds. But that depends upon God's will. But I speak from the beginning. When we reached Szczytno

Macko showed Lichtenstein's letter to the bailiff, who had in his youth been Lichtenstein's esquire. He received us hospitably, and allowed us to speak freely with the chaplain, from whom we learned many strange things which the hangman had told him."

"But the hangman is dumb."

"He is dumb, but he tells everything to the chaplain by signs, and the chaplain understands him as if he spoke with his tongue. The hangman had cut off Jurand's hand, torn out his tongue, and trickled out his eyes with pitch. To a man he will do any torture, but against a maid he will not lift a hand, and no torment could prevail with him in such a case. The cause of this is that he had once a daughter whom he loved much, but whom the Knights of the Cross——"

Here Hlawa hesitated, and did not know how to proceed. Jagienka saw it, and said:

"Why do you trouble me with a hangman's daughter?"

"Because it is of importance," answered the Bohemian.

"When our young Pan quartered the Knight Rotgier, the old Komthur Siegfried nearly went mad. It was said in Szczytno that Rotgier was his son, but this the priest denies, although he declares that no father ever loved a son more. To avenge him, Siegfried sold his soul to the devil, as the hangman bore witness. He spoke with the dead man as I speak with you, and the dead man smiled to him from the coffin, and, when the old Komthur promised him Zbyszko's head, he gnashed his teeth and licked his lips with his black tongue with joy. But as he could not then seize Zbyszko he had Jurand tortured, and laid his tongue and hand in Rotgier's coffin, whereupon, as the hangman told, they were devoured by the dead knight."

"It is terrible!" said Jagienka. And rising, she threw some faggots on the hearth, for it had become quite dark.

"Diederich, the hangman, saw it all," Hlawa went on. "After sating the vampire with human flesh, the old Komthur went off to fetch Jurand's child, for Rotgier had apparently besought him for a draught of innocent blood. But Diederich, who, as I have said, would do anything except injure a maid, had already placed himself in ambush on the staircase. When the Komthur came he heard Diederich's breathing and saw his eyes glittering, and thought he was the Evil One. Diederich struck him

on the nape of the neck, but did not kill him. The Komthur swooned, and became ill with terror; but when he recovered he did not dare attack Danusia."

"But he carried her off?"

"He carried her off and took Diederich along with her. He did not know that it was he who had protected her, but thought it was some supernatural power, either good or evil. He thought it well not to leave any witness in Szczytno, for though Diederich is dumb, he is able to communicate with the priest by means of signs. The chaplain told Macko that Siegfried would not now slay Danusia, for he is afraid, and even if he ordered anyone else to do so, Diederich would still protect her while he is alive. The priest did not know with certainty where they took her, but he heard them talk of Ragnet, a castle not far from the Lithuanian or the Samogitian frontier."

"And what did Macko say to this?"

"Next day Pan Macko said to me: 'If this is so, we shall perhaps find her, but I must go at once after Zbyszko lest they accomplish his ruin by means of her, even as they have ruined Jurand. If they should promise to restore her to him provided he himself should go to fetch her, he would go, and then old Siegfried would wreak upon him vengeance for Rotgier such as human eye has never seen.'"

"It is true!" exclaimed Jagienka alarmed. "If he hastened for this reason he did well. But he was wrong to send you here. Why should you be needed to guard us in Spychow? You would be of use to Zbyszko, for you are strong and shrewd."

"And who will take you to Zgorzelice, Panienka, in case of need?"

"In case of need you can precede them hither. Instead of sending the news by someone else, they can send it by you, and you shall take us back to Zgorzelice."

The Bohemian kissed her hand, and asked in a tender voice:

"And meanwhile you will remain here?"

"God protects orphans! We will remain here."

"But shall you not weary? What shall you do?"

"I shall pray to the Lord Jesus that He may restore Zbyszko's happiness and keep you all in good health."

And as she spoke she began to weep bitterly.

The Bohemian again knelt at her feet.

"You are like an angel from heaven!" he said.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JAGIENKA wiped her eyes and went with Hlawa to communicate the news to Jurand. They found him in the large chamber, sitting with a tame she-wolf at his feet, and old Tolima, Father Kaleb, and Anulka in the room beside him. The sexton of Spychow, who was also a minstrel, sang, to the accompaniment of a lute, of Jurand's battles with the Knights of the Cross, the company listening to him sadly, their heads resting on their hands. The moonlight streamed into the room through the open windows. A few logs glimmered on the hearth, where a lad was warming some mead mixed with wine and fragrant herbs. The singer had just begun another song relating to some victory of Jurand's when Jagienka entered and said:

"Praised be Jesus Christ!"

"For ever and ever!" answered Father Kaleb.

On hearing her voice, Jurand at once turned towards her, and greeted her by nodding his snow-white head.

"Zbyszko's groom has arrived from Szczytno," said the girl, "and has brought news from the priest there. Macko has gone to Prince Witold."

"How so? He will not then return?" asked Father Kaleb.

She then related all she had learned from the Bohemian, nor did she conceal that Macko hoped to find both Zbyszko and Danusia and bring them to Spychow, for which reason he had ordered her and Anulka to remain there for the present.

When she concluded a silence seemed to fall upon the room. From the lindens in the courtyard came the song of the nightingales, filling the chamber as with a flood. All eyes turned towards Jurand, who sat with his head inclined backwards, and gave no sign of life.

"Have you heard?" asked Father Kaleb at length.

In reply he leaned his head still further back, and pointed his finger towards heaven.

The moonlight bathed his face, his white hair, and his eyeless sockets. His features bore such an expression of martyrdom mingled with submission to the divine will that it seemed to all that they beheld a soul freed from its bodily fetters, having renounced for ever its earthly life, and neither asking nor expecting anything of it.

Again there was silence, and again the voices of the nightingales floated through the windows and flooded the room.

Suddenly a great compassion mingled with childlike love for the unhappy old man filled Jagienka, and, obeying her first impulse, she sprang towards him. Seizing his hand, she began to kiss it and to bedew it with her tears.

"I too am an orphan!" she exclaimed, her heart swelling with pity. "I am no youth, but Jagienka of Zgorzelice. Macko took me with him to protect me from wicked people. But now I will remain with you until God shall restore you Danusia."

Jurand showed no astonishment, as if he already knew she was a girl; he only drew her towards him and pressed her to his bosom, while she repeatedly kissed his hand.

"I will remain with you," she said again, "and Danusia will come back. I shall then go to Zgorzelice. God protects orphans. The Germans slew my father, but your darling is alive, and will return. May God grant it! May the Holy Mother, the Compassionate, grant it!"

And Father Kaleb suddenly kneeled, and said in a solemn voice:

"Kyrie eleison!"

"Christe eleison!" responded Hlawa and Tolima immediately.

All knelt down, for they understood that it was a litany such as is said, not only at deathbeds, but also to save those who are near and dear from deadly peril. Jagienka knelt, and Jurand glided off the bench on which he sat and knelt beside her.

The voices rose as if from a choir:

"Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison! Father of Heaven—Lord, have mercy upon us! Son, Saviour of the world—Lord, have mercy upon us!"

The human voices and their supplications, "Lord, have

mercy upon us!" were mingled with the song of the nightingales.

But suddenly the tame she-wolf rose from the bear-skin that lay by Jurand's bench, crept to the open window, reared her fore-paws up to the window frame, and, stretching out her sharp snout towards the moon, began howling low and dismally.

PART VII

CHAPTER XLIX.

ALTHOUGH Hlawa worshipped Jagienka, and his heart was being constantly drawn more and more to Anulka, his thoughts were, before everything, taken up with the war. When Jagienka told him—what was indeed true—that Spychow was not threatened and that his duty was at Zbyszko's side, he gladly agreed with her. Macko was not his superior, and he could easily justify himself with him for not remaining in Spychow, by urging that his mistress had commanded him to go to Zbyszko. Hlawa was in such haste to go, that when he and Jagienka came from Jurand's presence he knelt at her feet and begged her to dismiss him on his journey.

"What?" said Jagienka; "will you go to-day?"

"To-morrow before daybreak," he answered, "so that the horses may rest during the night. It is a long journey to Samogitia."

"Then, go! You will overtake the Knight Macko the sooner."

"That will not be easy. The old Pan is inured to all hardships, and has preceded me by some days. Besides he will ride through Prussia to shorten his way, while I must traverse many forests. He carries letters from Lichtenstein which he can show on his way, but I have nothing but this to show"—here he laid his hand on the hilt of his sword—"and to employ in securing free passage."

"Have a care!" exclaimed Jagienka. "If you go you must reach your goal and not fall into any Teuton dungeon. And in the forests, too, you must be wary, for now they are haunted by evil spirits, whom the people worshipped before they became Christians. So

the Knight Macko and Zbyszko related to us in Zgorzelice."

"I remember. But I somehow do not fear them, for they are poor creatures enough—not gods—and possess no power. I will make them smart, as well as any Germans I may meet—if only the war break out as I hope."

"Has it not already broken out? What did you hear among the Germans?"

"It has broken out, and yet it has not," answered Hlawa discreetly, after a moment's reflection. "Some years ago Prince Witold, having designs against the Tartars and desiring peace with the Teutonic Order, ceded Samogitia to the Germans. There was, therefore, peace and concord between him and them. He allowed them to build castles, and even helped them in the building. He had even a meeting with the Grand Master on a certain island, and they ate and drank together, expressing great love for each other. The Knights of the Cross were not forbidden to hunt in the forests, and when the poor Samogitians rose against the Teutonic rule Prince Witold helped the Germans, so that the Lithuanians murmured that he even fought against his own blood. All this the Bailiff of Szczytno told us, praising the Teutonic rule in Samogitia, inasmuch as the Order sent the people priests to baptize them, and also corn during famine. This was indeed done, for the Grand Master, who fears God more than the others, commanded it. But the Knights of the Cross also took the children away to Prussia, dishonoured the women before the eyes of their husbands and brothers, and hanged all who opposed them. Therefore, Panienska, there is, indeed, a war going on."

"And Prince Witold?"

"For a time the Prince shut his eyes to the Samogitian grievances and loved the Knights of the Cross. People said that the friendship would be eternal, but suddenly the Prince's heart changed towards them. They demanded that he should give up refugees, and he answered that he would only surrender men of common condition, but not freemen who had a right to live where they chose. Hereupon they began to grow sour towards each other and to threaten each other. On hearing this, the Samogitians at once attacked the Germans. They

slew their garrisons and demolished their castles, and now they are making inroads into Prussia itself. And the Prince not only does not hinder them, but he even laughs at the woes of the Germans and secretly aids their foes."

"I understand," said Jagienka. "But if he helps them secretly, there is as yet no war."

"There is war with the Samogitians, and also with Prince Witold. All the Germans will go to defend the frontier castles, and they purpose also making a great expedition into Samogitia. But they must delay it until winter, for the country is marshy, and horsemen could not fight on such ground. A Samogitian will pass through where a German would stick. But when the frosts come the whole strength of the Knights of the Cross will set out, and Prince Witold will go to help the Samogitians. He will go with the permission of the King of Poland, for the King is the Grand Duke's over-lord, and the over-lord of all Lithuania."

"Then there may be war with the King also?"

"They say in the country of the Germans, as well as here, that it will be so. They say that the Knights of the Cross are already begging for succour at every Court, for the King's might is not to be trifled with. And they say that, if any one mentions the Teutonic Order in the presence of a Polish knight, he at once clenches his fists."

Jagienka sighed.

"If anything should happen," he continued, "I will inform you. Before we went to Szczytno there were here two youths preparing to set out to the war, and Tolima cannot restrain them, for they are noblemen from Lekawica. They will travel with me, and in case of need I will instantly dispatch one of them with news."

"God reward you! I have always known that you have judgment in times of need; but for your devotion and goodwill towards me I shall be grateful to you till death."

The Bohemian knelt on one knee and said:

"In your house I have never experienced wrong, but only benefits. The Knight Zych, your father, took me prisoner at Boleslawiec in my early youth, and freed me without any ransom, but your service was more pleasant to me than freedom. May God grant that I shed my blood for you, Panienska!"

"God protect you and bring you back!" she said, stretching out her hand to him.

But he preferred to bend at her feet and kiss them, the better to show his respect and devotion. Then lifting his head, but without rising, he said timidly and humbly:

"I am but a simple groom, but I am a nobleman and your faithful servant. Give me, then, some keepsake to take on my way. Do not refuse it me!"

"What keepsake would you have of me?" asked Jagienka, surprised.

"Gird me with some ribbon, so that if I fall in fight it may be easier for me to die."

A look of pain fled across Jagienka's face, and she replied, as if with involuntary bitterness:

"Do not ask it of me, for by anything of mine you will gain nothing. Let some one who is happy gird you, and that will bring you good fortune. But what is there in me? Nothing but sorrow! And what awaits me? Nothing but woe! Oh, I cannot bring fortune either to you or anyone else, for I cannot give that which I do not myself possess. Hlawa! I feel so unhappy that—that——"

She stopped abruptly, feeling that if she said one word more she would burst into tears. Hlawa understood all that was passing within her, but as he saw no remedy for her misfortune he merely embraced her feet once more, exclaiming:

"Ah! To die for you, Panienska!—to die!"

"Rise!" she said. "Sieciech's daughter, Anulka, will gird you for the war and give you some keepsake, for she has long been friendly towards you."

Jagienka called her, and Anulka presently came from the adjacent room. Although she was burning to say farewell to the handsome Bohemian, she was nevertheless timid, and stood with downcast eyes before him, unable to utter a word.

"I am going to the war," he said, addressing her. "Perhaps I shall fall. Are you not sorry for me?"

"I am sorry, indeed," answered the girl in a trembling voice, and her tears began to flow, so that the Bohemian was moved to kiss her hand.

"Gird him about," said Jagienka, "or give him a keepsake to carry with him, so that he may fight under your device."

But it was not easy for her to give him anything, for Anulka wore the clothes of a youth. She sought about her vainly for some ribbon, and was much confused at finding nothing. Seeing this, Jagienka advised her to give him the net which she wore on her head.

"By Heaven! Let it be the net!" exclaimed Hlawa, brightening. "I shall hang it on my helm, and unlucky will be the mother of the German who grasps at it!"

Anulka raised both hands to her head, and immediately a bright flood of hair fell over her shoulders. Hlawa's face flushed and then paled. He took the net, kissed it, and placed it in his bosom. Then, once more embracing Jagienka's feet, and afterwards—perhaps more ardently than was necessary—Anulka's, he said, "Then be it so!" and left the room without another word.

Although tired with travelling he did not go to sleep, but drank deeply all night with the two young noblemen from Lekawica who were to accompany him to Samogitia. Nevertheless at daybreak he was already in the courtyard, where the horses stood waiting for their departure. Father Kaleb and old Tolima came to give him advice for his journey.

"Go first to the Court of Prince Janusz," said the priest. "The Knight Macko may have stopped there. In any case you will receive trustworthy intelligence. If you wish to reach Pan Zbyszko in safety, do not proceed directly to Samogitia, for then you must cross the Prussian frontier, and the Samogitians may kill you. If you approach from Prince Witold's side it will be different. Howbeit, God bless you and both these knights, and may you return in good health and bring Danusia with you. It seems impossible that God should permit an injury to such a lamb. She was guilty of nothing towards the Knights of the Cross. She was innocent as God's own lilies; she was pleasing to men, and sang like a field-bird. God loves children and has mercy on human suffering; and even if they have slain her, He may yet raise her from the dead, as St. Stanislaw raised Piotrowin. Go in good health, and may His hand protect both you and her!"

Having said this, he returned to the chapel to celebrate early mass. Hlawa mounted his horse and rode off, for the day had now completely broken.

CHAPTER L.

ALTHOUGH Prince Janusz and the Princess had gone to Czersk, the Bohemian learned many important matters concerning private affairs, as well as the war, from Mikolaj of Dlugolas. Macko had apparently altered his intention of proceeding to Samogitia, over the Prussian frontier, for a few days before he had been in Warsaw, where he had seen the Prince and Princess. Old Mikolaj also confirmed all that Hlawa had heard in Szczytno about the war. Samogitia had risen as one man against the Germans, and Prince Witold no longer sided with the Order against the unhappy country. He had not as yet declared war against the Order, but he nevertheless supplied the Samogitians with money, men, horses, and corn. Meanwhile he, as well as the Order, sent envoys to the Pope, the Emperor, and other Christian princes, accusing each other of disloyalty, faithlessness, and treachery. The Grand Duke's letters were carried by Mikolaj of Rzeniew, a man well acquainted with the crimes and craftiness of the Teutons.

When, at the Diet of Wilno, the ties binding Lithuania and Poland were still further strengthened, the Germans were struck with consternation, for it was easy to see that King Jagiello, being the over-lord of all the countries ruled by Prince Witold, would side with him in the event of a war. Count Johann Sayn, Komthur of Graudenz, and Count Schwartzburg, Komthur of Dantzic, were sent by the Grand Master to the King to inquire what the Order might expect of him. But although they brought him gifts, including gyrfalcons and many costly vessels, the King gave them no answer. They therefore threatened war, but not with assurance, for in their hearts they knew that the Grand Master and the Chapter feared Jagiello's might, and wished to put off the evil day.

The negotiations—particularly between the Order and

Prince Witold—were breaking off like cobwebs. On the evening after Hlawa's arrival Bronisz of Ciasnocie, a courtier of Prince Janusz, and two Lithuanian dukes came to the Court of Warsaw bearing letters from Witold and the Samogitians. The news was threatening. The order was preparing for war. They were fortifying their castles, preparing powder and stone cannon-balls, and mustering knechts and knights on the borderland. Bodies of infantry and light horsemen had already crossed the Lithuanian and Samogitian frontiers from Ragnet, Gotteswerder, and other frontier strongholds. The woods, the thickets, the fields, and the villages resounded with the clamour of war, and at night the glare of conflagrations shone above the forest ocean. Witold had at length taken Samogitia under his protection; he had sent thither his governors, and appointed Skirwoillo, famous for his daring, to be military commander. Skirwoillo had broken into Prussia, burning, destroying, and devastating. The Prince himself had pushed his army towards Samogitia, fortifying some castles and demolishing others—such as Kowno—lest they should serve as supports for the Knights of the Cross. It was apparent to every one that as soon as winter came and the marshes were frozen, or even sooner if the summer should be dry, all Lithuania, Samogitia, and Prussia would be involved in a great war, and that, if the King should aid Witold, the day must come when the Teuton wave must either overflow the world or be driven back into the bed which it had occupied for ages.

The petition of the unhappy Samogitians was read in Krakow, in Prague, and at the Papal Court. The open letter was brought to Prince Janusz by the bojars who came with Bronisz of Ciasnocie. On hearing its contents many a Mazovian involuntarily grasped his sword, and asked himself whether he ought not at once to enrol himself under Witold's colours. "Listen!" said the Samogitians to kings, princes, and peoples. "We were a free and noble nation, but the Order would transform us into slaves. They seek not our souls, but only our goods and our lands. Our destitution is so great that we are forced either to beg or to rob. How can they wash us in the waters of baptism if they themselves have not clean hands? We would be baptized, but not with blood and the sword; we would have the Faith, but such as it is practised by virtuous monarchs like Jagiello and Witold. They have

taken from us our cattle, our beehives, our harvests ; we are no longer allowed to catch fish or to hunt in the forests. They have bent our free necks to do night labour at their castles ; they have carried off our children as hostages ; they have dishonoured our wives and daughters. They have burnt our houses with fire ; they have taken our lords by force to Prussia ; they have drunk our blood like wolves. Give ear to us, for we are human beings and not beasts. We cry to the Holy Father that he may order our baptism by Polish bishops, for we thirst for baptism with our whole souls. But let us be baptized with the water of grace, and not with the living blood of destruction ! ”

Such were the complaints of the Samogitians. All hearts were moved with indignation, and many knights resolved to go instantly to their succour. At this Hlawa rejoiced exceedingly, for it made the defeat of the Knights of the Cross less doubtful. He was pleased, too, at the prospect of seeing Zbyszko, Macko, and Prince Witold himself, whose fame had long resounded throughout the world. He therefore resolved to hasten forward by forced marches, staying nowhere longer than was needed to rest the horses. The bojars who had accompanied Bronisz of Ciasnocie and other Lithuanians belonging to the Princess's Court, being acquainted with the roads, undertook to guide him and the other Mazovian knights from village to village, from town to town, and through the immense forests which covered the greater part of Mazovia, Lithuania, and Samogitia.

CHAPTER LI.

THE chief forces of Skirwoillo lay in the forests some five miles westward from Kowno, which had been demolished by Witold himself. Here the Bohemian found Zbyszko, as well as Macko, who had arrived only two days before. Macko received him angrily, and asked why he had not remained in Spychow according to his orders. Hlawa excused himself by saying that Jagienka had expressly commanded him to go, and that he himself was eager to take part in the war. He urged, moreover, the desirability of instantly dispatching a messenger to Spychow in case of need.

"The Panienka," he said, "herself prays for Jurand's daughter in opposition to her own well-being. If Danusia be not alive, then may God grant her eternal light, for she was innocent as a lamb. But if she be found the Panienka must be told as speedily as may be, so that she may leave Spychow at once, and not after Danusia's return, as if she were driven off by shame and ignominy. She should have stayed in Zgorzelice; the journey was a mistake."

Macko listened with apparent displeasure, and said:

"All this does not concern you. You have grown arrogant. Are you a dubbed knight or only a servant?"

"I am a servant," answered Hlawa, "but a servant of the Panienka, and for that reason am I anxious that no shame shall happen to her."

Old Macko mused gloomily, for he was dissatisfied with himself. Already he had reproached himself for taking Jagienka from Zgorzelice, for he felt that in bringing her to Zbyszko he had lowered the girl, and that if Danusia were found the slight would be the greater. He felt, too, that the bold words of the Bohemian were true, for he knew that he had taken Jagienka with him chiefly to preserve her in case of need for Zbyszko.

"She herself urged that we should take her," said Macko, in order to justify himself in his own and in Hlawka's eyes.

"Assuredly she urged it, because we persuaded her that the other girl was no longer alive."

"It was you who persuaded her!" exclaimed Macko.

"I did; and I, too, am at fault. But now it is for us to discover the truth."

"What is to be done," answered Macko, "with such an army and in such a war? If anything better is to be done it will be in July, for there are only two war seasons for the Germans—in winter-time or in a dry summer."

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Zbyszko and Skirwoillo, the commander. The latter was a man of small stature, but strong and broad shouldered. His breast was so prominent that it looked almost like a hump, and his arms were extremely long, reaching almost to his knees. His life had been spent in war. He had fought against the Tartars in Rus, as well as against the Germans, whom he hated like the plague.

"We have been speaking of an expedition," said Zbyszko, "and have come that we may benefit by your ripe experience."

Macko made Skirwoillo sit on a block of pine covered with a bearskin, and then ordered a servant to bring a small vat of mead. When all had refreshed themselves, Macko inquired:

"You wish, then, to make an expedition?"

"Yes, to burn some German castle."

"Which castle?"

"Ragnet or New Kowno."

"Ragnet," said Zbyszko. "Four days ago we were at New Kowno, and they defeated us."

"That is why we must go again," said Skirwoillo.

"How so?"

"Wait," said Macko; "where is Ragnet and where is New Kowno?"

"From here to Old Kowno is five miles, and from Old to New Kowno is five more. The castle is on an island. We tried to cross the river, but they repulsed us at the passage. Our army was so dispersed in the forest that many have returned only to-day."

"And Ragnet?"

Skirwoillo stretched out his long arms towards the north, and said:

"Far! Very far!"

"That is why we ought to go there," said Zbyszko. "The Germans there do not expect any attack at present, so we should strike them unawares."

"Those are least prepared for attack who have just won a victory," muttered Skirwoillo.

Macko now began to speak and to support Zbyszko's opinion, for he saw that the youth had hopes of learning something at Ragnet rather than at New Kowno. From time to time Skirwoillo raised his brows in approval and muttered: "He speaks truth! He speaks truth!" Finally he sank his enormous head between his broad shoulders, and seemed to meditate profoundly. After a time he rose up, and without another word began to take leave.

"Then what shall we do, Duke?" asked Macko. "Whither shall we go?"

"To New Kowno," he answered briefly. He then left the tent.

Macko and the Bohemian looked at Zbyszko in amazement for a time. Then the old knight struck his thighs and exclaimed:

"Faugh! What a blockhead! He seemed to be listening, and now he seems to have heard nothing! It is not worth while wasting breath on him."

"I have been told of his temper," said Zbyszko, "but indeed this whole people is most obstinate. They will listen to other people's opinions, but to attempt to influence them is like blowing against the wind."

"Then why did he ask?"

"Because we are knights, and in order to hear all sides. But he is no fool."

"In all likelihood," said Hlawa, "they expect us least at New Kowno, because of their recent victory. In that he was assuredly right."

"Let us go and see the men I command," said Zbyszko, who felt the atmosphere of the tent hot and close. "I must tell them to get ready."

As they went out it was perfectly dark. The sky was cloudy, and the only light visible was the camp fires, round which the Samogitians were sitting.

CHAPTER LII.

THE encampment was situated on low ground surrounded by forests and marshes. The ground itself, on which some huts had been erected, was quaggy and swampy, but it had been covered with fir and pine branches so thickly that the camping-place was made perfectly dry. For Duke Skirwoillo a rude hut of earth and rough timber had been hastily constructed, and several scores of others had been woven together out of branches for the more important chiefs. The common soldiers sat at fires in the open air, sheltered from the weather only by the skins which they wore about their bodies.

Hlawa examined with curiosity the arms which were piled up between the camp fires. These consisted of spears with long narrow heads made of wrought iron, halberds made of young oaks, in which were stuck flint stones and nails, hatchets with short hafts resembling Polish axes, and others with hafts nearly as long as those of the halberds which were used by foot soldiers. There were but few horses at the fires, for most of them were grazing at a distance in the forests and meadows under the charge of watchful grooms. Still some of the leading bojars had kept their steeds in the encampment in case of sudden need. Hlawa wondered at the shaggy bodies of these animals, which were exceedingly small, although they had very long necks.

The men themselves were tall. By the light of the fires Hlawa could distinguish their broad chests and stout shoulders beneath their sheepskin coverings. They were muscular and bony, and surpassed in stature the inhabitants of the other Lithuanian lands, for they occupied better and more fruitful regions, which were seldom visited by famines such as often ravaged Lithuania. In rudeness they even excelled the Lithuanians. To Wilno, the seat of the Grand Duke's Court, came envoys, foreign

merchants, and the inhabitants of the town and its neighbourhood were therefore familiar in some degree with foreign manners and civilisation. But here the only foreigners were the Knights of the Cross or the brothers of the Livonian Teutonic Order, who carried into their remote foreign settlements fire, slavery, and baptism by blood. Here, therefore, everything was wilder, coarser, and more primitive. Heathendom, too, was here more deeply rooted, for the worship of the Cross was taught, not by a mild harbinger of the Gospel with the love of an apostle, but by an armed German with a hangman's soul.

Skirwoillo and the chief dukes and bojars were already Christians, having followed the example of Jagiello and Witold. The other warriors, even the rudest of them, felt vaguely in their hearts that the extinction and death of the ancient world and of their ancient faith was approaching. They were ready to bow their heads before the Cross, if only the Cross were not raised before them by the hands of the hated Germans. Meanwhile, as the old faith was waning like an unreplenished fire, while, at the same time, all hearts were repulsed from the new because it was accompanied by German violence, all were filled with uneasiness and lingering regret for the past.

The Bohemian, having been accustomed from childhood to the boisterous mirth and singing of soldiers, was struck with the stillness and gloom of the camp. Only from a fire on the further side of Skirwoillo's hut came the sound of a fife and the words of a song sung in a low voice by a Lithuanian minstrel. The warriors listened with bowed heads and their eyes fixed on the red embers. As the knights passed they raised their heads, and the glare illumined their mild faces and blue eyes. Their looks were neither cruel nor rapacious, but were rather those of grieved and injured children. The night was now advancing, and the fires had begun to slacken and go out, while the growing silence increased the impression of sorrow and of gloom.

Zbyszko gave his orders to the men under his command. Then, turning to the Bohemian, he said:

"You have now seen enough. It is time to return."

"What I have seen," answered Hlawa, "does not greatly please me, for it can be seen at a glance that they are defeated men."

"Twice—four days ago at the castle, and two days ago at the ford. And now Skirwoillo means to go a third time to suffer yet another defeat."

"How is it he does not understand that with such an army he will accomplish nothing against the Germans? The Knight Macko has already told me, and now I have myself seen it. These fellows cannot be of much account in a battle."

"In that you are mistaken," said Zbyszko, "for they are men of rare courage. But they fight in disordered bands, while the Germans fight in ranks. If they succeed in breaking their ranks, then there are more Germans slain than Samogitians. And this the Germans know, and they close up their ranks and stand like a wall."

"But as to taking castles, surely that is not to be thought of?"

"There are no implements for the purpose. Prince Witold has such implements, but until he comes we shall not capture any castle except by accident or treachery."

They had now reached the tent, before which a huge fire was burning, and in it were some smoked viands, which had been prepared by the servants. The tent was cold and damp, so the two knights and Hlawa stretched themselves on skins before the fire. Having refreshed themselves, they tried to sleep, but could not. Macko tossed about from one side to another; then, seeing that Zbyszko was sitting before the fire awake and with his arms encircling his knees, he said:

"Tell me, why did you counsel going to Ragnet instead of attacking Gotteswerder, which is close by? What is your object?"

"Because my heart tells me that Danusia is at Ragnet, and because they are less on their guard there than here."

"I had not time to speak of this before, but, tell me, do you mean to search for that maid for ever?"

"She is no maid; she is my wife," answered Zbyszko.

Hereupon there was silence, for Macko knew that there was no answer possible. The fact that he had not been present at the marriage celebration caused him involuntarily to regard Jurand's daughter as a maid. The sacredness of the sacrament of marriage, however, rendered Zbyszko's search for his wife the most ordinary duty.

Meanwhile Hlawa had raised his head from his bearskin, and, pricking up his ears, began to listen attentively and with curiosity.

"Until you are overpowered by sleep," said Macko presently, "tell me what you have seen and done in Marienburg."

Zbyszko threw aside his hair, which had fallen over his forehead, and, after pausing for a few moments, said:

"God grant that I may know as much of Danusia as I know of Marienburg! You ask what I have seen there. I have seen the mighty power of the Knights of the Cross, supported by all kings and nations, so that I know not anything in the whole world that may contend with it. I have seen castles such as even the Roman Emperor himself probably does not possess; I have seen treasure inexhaustible and arms innumerable; I have seen multitudes of armed monks, knights, and soldiers; I have seen relics such as are not to be seen except in Rome, and I tell you that my heart grew cold, for I asked myself: 'Who will dare attack them? Who will overpower them? Who will resist them? Whom will their power not crush?'"

"May their mothers be cursed!—us!" exclaimed Hlawa, unable any longer to remain silent.

To Macko also Zbyszko's words seemed strange.

"Have you then forgotten Wilno?" he asked. "Do not you remember how they were never in haste to meet us, but were always complaining of our stubbornness. Some of their guests also challenged us, but all retired with ignominy. Why have you lost heart?"

"I have not lost heart, for at Marienburg too I fought, and there they fight with no blunt weapons. But you have not seen their whole power."

"And you," retorted the old man angrily, "have you seen the whole power of Poland? Have you seen all the banners together? No, you have not. And their power is based upon injury and treachery, for there is not an inch of land that is their own. Our princes received them as people receive a poor man into their house, and bestowed gifts upon them. After having prospered and acquired power, they bit the hand that fed them like infamous mad curs. They seized land and took towns by treachery. But if all the kings in the world came to their aid, a day of judgment and vengeance must come!"

"Since you asked me to tell you what I saw, and it angers you, I had best be silent," said Zbyszko.

Macko breathed angrily for a time, but presently grew calmer.

"A pine may stand in the forest big as a tower," he said; "you may think it will stand for ages, but if you strike it rightly with the back of an axe it will sound hollow, and rotten wood will fly from it. Such is the power of the Knights of the Cross. I asked you to tell me what you saw and did. You say you fought there?"

"I did. At first I was received haughtily and in unfriendly fashion, for they knew that I had fought with Rotgier. Some mishap might have befallen me had I not come with a letter from the Prince. De Lorche also defended me from their anger. Then came banquets and tournaments, and in these the Lord Jesus favoured me. Did you hear that Ulrich, the Grand Master's brother, took a liking to me, and procured me an order from the Grand Master himself that Danusia should be restored to me?"

"We heard," said Macko, "that his saddle-girth broke, and that you would not strike him."

"Yes, I raised my lance, and since then he took a liking to me. They gave me great letters, so that I might ride from one castle to another and search. I believed that here was an end to my wretchedness and sorrow, yet here I sit in a wilderness, unable to do anything, and growing more and more downcast every day."

As if moved with impatience and pain, he hurled a piece of wood into the fire, so that the sparks flew in a shower from the burning logs.

"Master your passion," said Macko. "What came of the safe-conduct? Would not the komthurs obey the Grand Master's orders?"

Tears glistened in Zbyszko's eyes, but he restrained himself, and said:

"The false dogs opened their castles and dungeons to me. I went everywhere and searched. Then this war broke out, and in Gerdau the Bailiff von Heideck told me that safe-conducts given in time of peace were of no avail during war. I challenged him to a combat, but he did not appear, and gave orders that I should be driven from the castle."

"And in other castles?" asked Macko.

"Everywhere it was the same."

"I now understand why you preferred to come here—so that you might at least obtain vengeance."

"I thought also that we might capture some prisoners,

and, perhaps, take some castles; but here they will take no castles."

"Ha! When Prince Witold himself comes it will be otherwise."

"God send him!"

"He will come. I heard at the Mazovian Court that the King and the whole power of Poland may come with him."

Just at this moment Skirwoillo unexpectedly emerged from the darkness.

"We start on the expedition," he said.

The knights hastily rose to their feet. Skirwoillo brought his enormous head close to their faces, and said in a low tone:

"We have had news. Reinforcements are on their way to New Kowno. Two knights are at the head of the soldiers, who are bringing cattle and provisions. We shall take them by surprise."

"We shall therefore cross the Niemen?" said Zbyszko.

"Yes; I know the ford."

"And do they know in the castle of these reinforcements?"

"They do, and they will go out to meet them. You will attack the garrison."

Skirwoillo then gave them directions for the attack, leaving the rest to their courage and ingenuity. When he had finished they returned with him to his hut, where the dukes and bojars were awaiting him. He repeated his orders, and then, raising a fife cut from a wolf's bone, he gave a loud, shrill whistle, which was heard from one end of the encampment to the other.

At this signal there was a movement about the almost extinguished fires. Here and there sparks began to fly and small flames to shoot up, gradually growing bigger and brighter, and as the fires blazed up again the wild forms of the warriors could be seen gathering round the piles of arms. The sleeping forest seemed to start and awake. Then from its depths came the shouting of the grooms as they drove the horses towards the encampment

CHAPTER LIII.

IN the morning they reached the Niewiaza and crossed the river, some on horseback, some holding to the horses' tails, and some on bundles of osiers. The fording was accomplished so quickly that Macko, Zbyszko, Hlawa, and the Mazovian volunteers wondered at the dexterity of the people, and understood why neither forests, nor swamps, nor rivers could stay the Lithuanian raids. In the evening they reached the Niemen. The great river was swollen with the spring rains, and the crossing was not easy. With the exception of two men who were carried away by the current, all reached the farther side in safety, where they remained without any fires until the morning.

At daybreak the troops were divided into two bodies. One, led by Skirwoillo, went forward to meet the knights who were bringing reinforcements to Gotteswerder. The other Zbyszko led backwards to the island, in order to take by surprise the garrison of the castle when they should go out to meet the reinforcements. Overhead the day was clear and bright, but beneath the pines, meadows, and bushes were shrouded in a thick white mist, which completely obscured the background.

"In such a mist," said Zbyszko, "we shall come to blows before we see each other. God grant that it does not disappear before noon!"

So saying he hastened forward to give orders to the centurions who rode in front, but presently he returned and said:

"We shall soon reach the high road leading from the ford opposite the island into the middle of the country. There we will lie in the thicket and await them."

"From whom have you heard of the high road?" asked Macko.

"From peasants in the neighbourhood who are acting as guides and are under my command."

"And at what distance from the castle and the island will you lie in ambush?"

"Some five miles distant."

"That is well, for if the distance were less they might send aid from the castle. You ought, besides, to send on two or three trustworthy fellows in front, so that we may be instantly warned when the Germans are coming. And one thing more—let one or two hundred men be kept out of the fight, so that they may cut off the way to the island as soon as it begins."

"Such orders have already been given," said Zbyszko. "The Germans must fall into the trap."

On hearing this Macko looked upon his nephew with approval, for he was glad to see that, in spite of his youth, he thoroughly understood warfare.

"I do not know how these men of ours will fight," said Macko, who was himself thirsting for the fray, "but they are proceeding quietly and dexterously, and their faces show eagerness for battle. If this Skirwoillo has laid his plans properly, none of the Germans should leave the encounter alive."

"God grant that few escape," said Zbyszko. "But I have ordered that as many prisoners as possible be taken, and that if a knight or a brother of the Order be among them he must on no account be slain."

"Why so, Pan?" asked the Bohemian.

"See you also to this," said Zbyszko. "A knight, even if only a guest of the Order, goes from town to town and from castle to castle, sees many people and hears much news; and if he be a brother of the Order, then he sees and hears still more. To tell the truth, I have come hither expressly to seize some important person in order to exchange him. This is all that is now left me—if, indeed, it is still left."

So saying he again spurred his horse forward to give his final orders, and at the same time to escape from his sorrowful thoughts.

"Why does the young Pan still hope that his wife is alive and in this country?" asked the Bohemian.

"Because," said Macko, "if Siegfried did not slay her in Szczytno under the first impulse, one may reasonably hope that she yet lives. It is difficult even for the most ruthless man to lift his hand against a defenceless woman—nay, against an innocent child."

"It is difficult; but not for a Knight of the Cross," answered Hlawa; "remember the children of Prince Witold!"

"True, they have the hearts of wolves. Yet he did not slay her in Szczytno, but came hither, so he may have hidden her in some other castle."

"Ha! If we could but capture this island and castle!"

"Only look at these men," said Macko contemptuously.

"Yes, but I have an idea which I must communicate to the young Pan."

"If you had a dozen ideas you cannot break walls with spears. Did you ever see such forces?"

And indeed the Bohemian had never seen anything similar. A host of soldiers rode before them in disorder, for in the forests and among the bushes it was impossible to keep the ranks. Horsemen were mixed with the foot soldiers, many of whom held on to the mane, saddles, and tails of the horses in order to keep pace with them. The shoulders of the men were covered with the skins of wolves, lynxes, and bears, and from their heads protruded boars' tusks and stags' horns or great, shaggy ears, so that in the mist they might have been taken for a herd of forest beasts.

It was already spring. The hazel trees which grew among the pines were covered with bright verdure. From among the soft, woolly mosses over which the soldiers stepped noiselessly sprang ferns and white and blue meadow saffron. The trees, soaked with abundant rains, smelt of their moist bark, and from the soil of the forest rose a strong, raw odour of fallen leaves and rotten wood. The sun's rays flashed in the raindrops that hung from the leaves, and overhead the birds clamoured joyously.

The men marched faster and faster, urged by Zbyszko. After a time he again rode to the rear of the detachment, where were Macko, the Bohemian, and the Mazovian volunteers.

"We must now go to the front!" he exclaimed with animation. "Listen!" he went on, as he led the way. "We may take the Germans by surprise, but if they should see anything and be able to maintain their order then we must go first to the attack, for our armour and swords are better."

"It will be well," said Macko.

Zbyszko again repeated his orders that if knights or

brothers wearing white mantles should be seen among the foot soldiers they must not be killed, but should be taken captive. Presently he stopped the detachment, for they had reached the high road leading from the ford. He selected a point at a turning, so that the enemy might not be able to withdraw in time or to stand in order of battle. Here he occupied both sides of the track, and ordered his men to await the enemy.

The Samogitians, accustomed to the forests and to forest fighting, hid themselves so dexterously behind the trunks of trees, hazel bushes, and young firs that the earth seemed to have swallowed them up. Not a man made any noise, not a horse snorted. From time to time some creature of the forest passed close to the concealed men, and only when it had almost touched them did it rush away in terror. For a time nothing was heard but the rustle of the forest and the voices of the birds, and they grew wearied with waiting. The mist beneath the trees became less dense, the sun rose and began to give out heat, but still the men lay motionless.

"Pan," whispered Hlawa, "if God grant that none of these whelps remain alive, could not we then go to the castle at night, cross the river, and suddenly seize it?"

"Do you think they do not guard the boat and have no watchword?"

"They have a guard and a watchword," whispered the Bohemian, "but the prisoners, threatened with death, will say the watchword, and even give it themselves to the guards in German. If we but set foot on the island, then the castle itself——"

He stopped, for Zbyszko had suddenly laid his hand on Hlawa's mouth, and at the same moment the croaking of a raven was heard from the high road.

"Be still," said Zbyszko. "That is the signal!"

In the space of two paternosters a Samogitian appeared on a small shaggy horse, whose hoofs were wrapped in sheepskins, so as to make no sound and leave no traces on the marshy ground. He looked sharply round about as he rode, and suddenly hearing from the thicket an answer to his croaking, he plunged into the forest and was soon at Zbyszko's side.

"They are coming!" he said.

CHAPTER LIV.

From the Samogitian Zbyszko learnt that the detachment did not exceed a hundred and fifty men, of whom fifty were horsemen, and that they were under the command, not of a Knight of the Cross, but of a lay knight. An advance guard of eight men rode a couple of bow-shots in front. They were now only a few furlongs distant.

Zbyszko gave orders that the advance guard should be allowed to pass unmolested, or, if they should enter the forest to examine it, that they should be captured as quietly as possible.

Presently the guard appeared, led by a red-bearded German. They paused and listened, evidently hesitating whether they should examine the adjacent forest, and finally passed on. Zbyszko waited until they had disappeared behind the next turning, and then approached the high road at the head of the more heavily armed of his men. Among them were Macko, Hlawa, the two wloodykas of Lekawica, three knights from the neighbourhood of Ciechanow, and a score of the most important and best equipped of the Samogitian bojars.

For a time they waited in silence, except for the ceaseless hum of the forest. But soon they heard the sound of human voices approaching from the east. Every moment it grew more and more distinct. Zbyszko instantly formed his followers into a wedge in the middle of the highway, with himself at their head, and Macko and Hlawa behind him.

"Curse their mothers! They are singing!" exclaimed the Bohemian presently. "They are singing merrily!"

And indeed it was no pious hymn that the Germans sang as they approached. By listening attentively one could distinguish that only some ten men were singing, but that a single word was repeated at intervals by all, making a noise like thunder in the forest.

"We shall see them immediately," said Macko, his face darkening and assuming a wolfish expression, as if the thirst for vengeance was upon him.

Borne on the wind now came distinctly the cry, repeated by all in chorus, "Tandaradei! Tandaradei!" and immediately the Bohemian distinguished the words of a song known to him:

. . . .
Bi den rôsen er wol mac,
Tandaradei!
Merken wa mir'z houlet lac. . . .
. . . .

Suddenly the song broke off, for from both sides of the road came the sound of croaking, so loud that it seemed as if a flock of ravens were screaming in the forest. The Germans evidently wondered that there should be so many, and that the sound should come from the ground instead of the tops of the trees. The first rank of soldiers now appeared at the turn of the road, and stood still as if thunderstruck at the sight of unknown horsemen standing opposite them.

In an instant Zbyszko stooped in his saddle, drove the spurs into his horse, and, rushing forward, shouted:

"On them!"

The others followed him. From the forest on either side arose the terrible clamour of the Samogitian warriors. Some two hundred paces separated Zbyszko's men from the Germans, who instantly lowered their pikes against the horsemen, while the rear ranks faced the forest on both sides to defend themselves against the flank attack. By an accident favourable to Zbyszko, the German cavalry had been posted in the rear, and it was now impossible for them to advance to the front through the body of foot soldiers. Moreover, they were now surrounded by the Samogitians, who swarmed out of the thicket like wasps whose nest some unwary traveller has struck with his foot.

Meanwhile, Zbyszko and his men attacked the foot soldiers. But the attack was fruitless. The Germans had driven the butt ends of their heavy lances and battle-axes into the ground, and held them like a wall against the light Samogitian horse, so that they could not break the defence. Macko's horse was disabled, and fell with its rider; but Macko, whose death seemed for a moment

certain, managed to free himself, when, unsheathing his sword, he attacked the spears and battle-axes like a furious gyrfalcon attacking a flock of long-beaked cranes. Hlawa, who placed his trust in the axe, hurled it among the Germans, and was for a moment weaponless. One of the wloodykas of Lekawica perished, and his brother, seized with madness at the sight, pushed his horse blindly into the enemy's host. Yet, though the bojars hewed furiously with their swords at the German lances, the ranks were not broken. The Samogitians, too, had to withdraw from the Germans again and again as if from a gigantic hedgehog.

Suddenly the wloodyka of Lekawica stooped from his horse and raised his brother's body from the ground, evidently with the intention of removing it for the time to a safe place so that he might the more easily find it after the battle. Presently, however, he changed his purpose, for all at once he again rushed against the Germans, and, raising the body above his head, he flung it upon the points of the spears, which bent beneath its weight, and before the Germans could withdraw them, the infuriated wloodyka had broken into their ranks, overthrowing his foes like a storm.

In an instant dozens of hands were stretched out against him, dozens of spears pierced his horse's sides; but before the ranks could be closed anew one of the Samogitian bojars rushed in also, followed by Zbyszko and Hlawa, and the terrible confusion grew every moment. The other bojars also seized the bodies and hurled them on the spear points, while from the flanks the Samogitians renewed their attack. The whole German host wavered and tottered, split like a tree before a wedge, and finally broke.

Immediately the battle was changed to a slaughter. In the throng the long German spears and battle-axes were useless, while the swords of the horsemen fell heavily on German heads and necks. From the sides of the roadway fresh bands of wild warriors rushed to the fray, their savage howls stifling the groans of the dying and the cries of the living for mercy. The vanquished threw down their arms, some tried to escape to the forest, while others fell to the ground, feigning that they were slain. At length the handful of Germans melted away. Only from the thicket came at intervals the echo of a

short fight or of a German cry of despair. Zbyszko, with Macko and the other horsemen, now hastened against the horsemen.

These, well mounted and arrayed in good armour, fought with admirable stubbornness. Among them no white mantle was discernible, for they were mostly Prussian gentry who were obliged to fight for the Order in war. The commander was a tall, thin knight, in a dark-blue cuirass and helm, with lowered visor. From the recesses of the forest came a shower of arrows, but these rebounded harmlessly from the frontlets, cuirasses, and hardened armlets of the Germans. A wall of Samogitians on horseback and on foot surrounded them closely, but they defended themselves so fiercely with their long swords that a heap of dead bodies soon lay before the horses' hoofs. All around there was crowding to confusion. Reinforced by Zbyszko and his followers, however, the assailants began to make the Germans waver. Macko ordered the Samogitians to arm themselves with the long German battle-axes which lay on the ground, and soon some thirty of the warriors had forced their way through the throng to the ranks of the foe.

"Strike at the horses' feet!" shouted Macko, and soon the effect of the stratagem was apparent, for the German knights could not reach the Samogitians with their swords. Then the knight in the blue cuirass saw that the end of the fight was near, and that all that remained for them was to break through the band that opposed their retreat or else perish.

The Germans wheeled and forced their assailants on their flanks, and, letting their horses loose, began to ride like a hurricane eastward. Another band which had just entered the fight tried to oppose them, but was scattered before the greater weight of their armour and horses. Although the way to the castle was now open, escape was far from certain, for the Samogitian horses were swifter than the Germans'. This the German commander well knew.

"Woe!" he exclaimed within himself. "Woe! Not one of them will escape unless I purchase their safety with my own blood."

Shouting to those nearest him to stop, he wheeled his horse, and, heedless whether anyone obeyed him or not, faced the enemy.

Zbyszko was among the first to meet him, and the German struck him on the visor, but without shattering it. Instead of answering with a blow, Zbyszko seized the knight round the body and endeavoured to draw him from his saddle, for he was anxious to take him alive at all costs. But his stirrup broke under the excessive pressure, and both knights fell to the ground. For a time they rolled about, fighting with their hands and feet, but at length Zbyszko's extraordinary strength enabled him to overpower his adversary by getting him under him. It was needless, however, for him to hold him down, for the German had swooned. Macko and Hlawa now came running towards them, and at the sight of them Zbyszko exclaimed:

"Help me to bind him! He is a belted knight!"

The Bohemian sprang from his horse, but, seeing the impotence of the vanquished knight, he did not bind him, but disarmed him instead, unbuckling his armlets, removing his girdle and sword, cutting the leather straps that secured the helm, and finally loosening the screws that closed the visor. But as soon as he beheld the knight's face he started up and exclaimed:

"Look, Pan! Look!"

"De Lorche!" cried Zbyszko.

For it was de Lorche who lay with pale, perspiring face, closed eyes, and motionless as a corpse.

CHAPTER LV.

HAVING given orders that de Lorche should be placed in one of the captured waggons, which were laden with new wheels and axles, Zbyszko mounted another horse and, accompanied by Macko, started in further pursuit of the flying Germans. It was no difficult pursuit, for the German horses were not swift, especially on a road softened by the spring rains. Macko, who rode a light and swift mare, soon left behind nearly all the Samogitians and overtook the hindmost of the German horsemen. In accordance with custom, he summoned him either to surrender or fight, but as the German feigned not to hear, and even threw away his shield to lighten his horse's burden, the old knight cleft him with his sword between the shoulders and brought him to the ground.

Thus did he avenge on the flying men the treacherous wound he had formerly received from the Germans. They ran before him like a herd of stags and tried to take refuge in the forest. The recesses resounded with their cries, for they were hotly pursued by the Samogitians, and ere long all were captured. Macko, Zbyszko, and Hlawa now returned to the scene of the first fight. There they found the people drunk with joy, for the victory was a great one.

After having buried the two wloodykas of Lekawica, who had chiefly helped in obtaining the victory, and ordered Hlawa to watch over de Lorche, who was still insensible, Zbyszko marched his men along the same road towards Skirwoillo in order to give him aid in case of need. But after a long march they reached another battlefield which was deserted—only covered with the bodies of Samogitians and Germans. As they had met no Germans proceeding to the castle, they had no difficulty in concluding that the terrible Skirwoillo had

also won a great victory. Yet it must have been a bloody one, for a little further on, behind the battlefield itself, the bodies of the slain were still lying thick. From this the experienced Macko concluded that some of the Germans had succeeded in escaping from discomfiture.

As it was impossible to tell whether Skirwoillo had pursued them or not, Zbyszko resolved to return to the old encampment. Arriving there late at night, he found that the Samogitian chief had returned only a little while before. With a face lit with malignant joy, he inquired concerning the battle, and learning of the victory, he said, in a voice like a raven's croak:

"I am content with myself and with you. Reinforcements will not reach them soon; and if the Grand Duke should come, he too will be glad, for the castle will be ours."

"To me God has vouchsafed one prisoner," said Zbyszko. "He is a mighty and worthy knight, although only a lay knight and a guest."

The terrible Samogitian encircled his neck with his hands, and then made a movement with his right hand as if to indicate a rope rising from the neck.

"It will be so with him!" he said. "Even as with the others—thus!"

Zbyszko knit his brows.

"Listen, Skirwoillo," said he. "It shall not be so or otherwise with him, for he is my prisoner and friend. We were both dubbed at the same time by Prince Janusz, and I will not permit you to lay even a finger upon him."

"You will not?"

"I will not!"

For a moment it seemed as if both would burst into a passion of rage, but Zbyszko, who loved and respected the old commander, suddenly threw his arms about his neck and, pressing him to his bosom, exclaimed:

"Would you wrest him from me, and with him my last hope? Why would you wrong me?"

Skirwoillo did not repulse these embraces.

"Well," said he, after an interval of silence, "to-morrow I mean to have my prisoners hanged, but if any one of them can be of service to you I will bestow him on you also."

Hereupon they embraced anew and took leave of each other amicably, much to the delight of Macko.

"Apparently one can do nothing with him by anger,"

he said, "but with gentleness he may be moulded like wax."

"Such are all these people," answered Zbyszko, "only the Germans do not know it."

So saying, he gave orders for de Lorche to be brought before him, and presently Hlawka led him from the tent where he had been reposing. He was unarmed, without a helm, and wore a leather jerkin, which bore the marks of the cuirass, and a red cap. De Lorche had learnt from the Bohemian whose prisoner he was, and for this reason he approached proudly, his face marked with coldness, obduracy, and contempt.

"Be thankful to God," said Zbyszko, "that He has given you into my hands, for from me you have nothing to fear." And as he spoke he stretched out his hand in a friendly fashion, but de Lorche made no movement.

"I do not clasp the hand of knights who disgrace knightly honour by fighting with Saracens against Christians," he answered.

One of the Mazovians who stood by translated his words, the meaning of which, however, Zbyszko had himself understood. For a moment Zbyszko's blood boiled.

"Fool!" he exclaimed, involuntarily grasping the hilt of his sword.

"Kill me!" said de Lorche, raising his head. "I know you do not spare prisoners."

"And you!" exclaimed the Mazovian, unable to bear such taunts calmly, "do you spare them? Did not you hang on the shore of the island all whom you seized in your last victory?"

"It was done," said de Lorche; "but they were heathens." Yet there was something of shame in his answer, and it was easy to see that in his soul he did not approve such deeds.

Meanwhile Zbyszko's wrath had cooled.

"De Lorche!" he said calmly and with dignity, "we received our girdles and spurs from the same hand. You know me, and you know that I love chivalrous honour better than life and happiness. Listen, then, to what I shall tell you upon my oath, which I swear by St. George. Many of these people have long received baptism, and those who are not yet Christians stretch out their hands towards the Cross as to salvation. But do you know who hinders them from being baptized?"

The interpreter at once translated Zbyszko's words, whereupon de Lorche looked inquiringly at his questioner.

"The Germans!" answered Zbyszko.

"Impossible!" exclaimed de Lorche.

"By the spear and spurs of St. George—the Germans! For if the Cross reigned in this land they would have no pretext for invasions, for dominating the country, and oppressing its unhappy people. You, de Lorche, have known them, and you well know whether their deeds are just."

"But I believed that they redeemed their sins by fighting against the heathen and inducing them to be baptized."

"They baptize them with the sword and blood, not with the water of salvation. Only read this writing, and you will at once see whether you do not yourselves serve evil-doers, bloodthirsty scoundrels, and the devil's emissaries, acting against Christian faith and love."

As he spoke, he handed him a copy of the letter which the Samogitians had addressed to the kings and princes. De Lorche took it and read it quickly—for he was an adept at reading—by the light of the fire. As he read, his face expressed wonder.

"Is all this true?" he asked.

"So help me God, who sees the heart, I serve here not my own cause alone, but that of justice!"

De Lorche was silent for a moment.

"I am your prisoner," he said at length.

"Give me your hand," answered Zbyszko. "You are my brother, not my prisoner."

Each gave the other his right hand, and they then sat down to supper which the servants had prepared by Hlawa's order. De Lorche, greatly to his astonishment, learned that, in spite of the letter given him, Zbyszko had not recovered Danusia, and that the komthurs denied the validity of the safe conducts because of the outbreak of war.

"I now understand why you are here," he said, "and I thank God that I am your prisoner, for I think the Knights of the Order will give you any one you desire in exchange for me, otherwise there would be a great outcry in the West, as I am descended from a mighty family——"

He suddenly struck his cap with his hand, and exclaimed:

"By all the relics of Aix-la-Chapelle! Are you aware that at the head of the reinforcements on their way to Gotteswerder were Arnold von Baden and old Siegfried von Loewe. I know it from letters which reached the castle. Have not they been taken?"

"No," answered Zbyszko, starting up abruptly. "No one of greater importance has been taken. But this is great news! By Heaven! There are other prisoners from whom I may learn, before they are hanged, whether there was any woman with Siegfried!"

He summoned his servants to light him with torches of pine wood, and proceeded to the place where Skirwoillo's prisoners were kept. De Lorche, Macko, and the Bohemian went with him.

"Listen!" said de Lorche as they went. "You will set me free upon my word of honour, and I will myself seek her throughout all Prussia. When I find her I will return to you, and then you can exchange me for her."

"If she is alive—if she is alive!" answered Zbyszko.

Meanwhile, they reached the prisoners. Some lay on their backs, others stood by the tree trunks bound cruelly with ropes. The torches illumined Zbyszko's head, so that the eyes of all the unhappy men were turned towards him.

Suddenly from among them came a loud, frightened voice.

"My lord and protector!" it cried, "save me!"

From the servant's hands Zbyszko seized some burning chips and rushing with them towards the tree whence the voice proceeded, raised them above his head.

"Sanderus!" he exclaimed.

"Sanderus!" repeated Hlawa in amazement.

And Sanderus, unable to move his bound arms, stretched out his neck and cried:

"Mercy! . . . I know where Jurand's daughter is! . . . Save me! Save me!"

CHAPTER LVI.

THE servants released Sanderus immediately, but his limbs were so benumbed that he fell to the ground. By Zbyszko's order he was placed before the fire and given food and drink. But although he was rubbed with hog's grease and afterwards covered with warm skins he did not yet recover consciousness, but fell into such a deep sleep that at noon on the following day it was with difficulty that the Bohemian succeeded in rousing him.

Zbyszko, who was burning with impatience, came to Sanderus at once, but it was long before the pedlar of relics recovered his composure and strength sufficiently to speak. At length, after mustering his scattered senses and refreshing himself with a draught of fermented mare's milk, he began lamenting loudly that "the sons of Belial" had almost beaten him to death with their spears, that they had taken away his horse, which carried relics of matchless virtue and price, and that, when they bound him to the tree, he had been bitten almost to death by ants.

At last Zbyszko lost all patience.

"Answer my questions, knave," he exclaimed angrily, "lest some worse thing yet befall you!"

"Here is a hill of red ants," said Hlawa. "Let me lay him on it, Pan, and he will soon recover his tongue." He did not speak in earnest, but even smiled, for he really wished the man well. But Sanderus was terrified, and cried:

"Mercy! Mercy! Give me more of this heathenish drink, and I will then tell you all I have seen and all I have not."

He again put a great flask of koumiss to his lips, and began gulping down the fluid, opening and shutting his eyes as he drank. When he had taken some two quarts or more he shook himself, placed the flask on his knees, and exclaimed, as if he had drunk against his own will:

"A vile beverage this!" Then, turning towards Zbyszko, he said: "And now, my saviour, put your questions!"

"Was my wife in the company with which you travelled?"

Astonishment was depicted on Sanderus' face. He had heard that Danusia was Zbyszko's wife, but as the wedding had been secret and Danusia had been carried off immediately afterwards, he had always thought of her only as Jurand's daughter.

"Yes, Lord Palatine, she was!" he answered hastily. "But Siegfried von Loewe and Arnold von Baden broke through the enemy's ranks."

"Did you see her?" asked the youth with beating heart.

"I did not see her face, Pan, but I saw a closed litter of brushwood, borne between two horses, in which someone was carried, and it was guarded by a servant of the Order, the same reptile who was sent by Danveld to the forest manor. From the litter a piteous song reached my ear——"

Zbyszko turned pale with emotion, and for a time could ask nothing else. Macko and Hlawa were also deeply moved, the Bohemian doubtless thinking of his beloved mistress in Spychow, to whom this news must bring further unhappiness.

At length Macko, who did not know Sanderus, looked at him with suspicion, and asked:

"Who are you, and what took you among the Knights of the Cross?"

"Who am I, most worshipful knight?" answered the rascal. "That you may learn," he said, indicating Zbyszko, "of this valiant duke or of yonder brave Bohemian count, both of whom have long known me."

Apparently the koumiss had now begun to influence him, for he became more animated, and showed little sign of his former weakness.

"You have saved my life doubly, Pan," he said to Zbyszko in a loud voice. "Without you I should have been eaten by wolves or visited with punishment by the bishops who, misled by my enemies—ah, how sinful is this world!—issued an order to have me prosecuted for selling my relics, whose genuineness they called in question. With you I have never lacked food or drink—and

better drink than this mare's milk, which I abhor, but which I will nevertheless drink once more to show that a poor pious pilgrim does not shrink from any mortification."

"Cease from playing the buffoon!" exclaimed Macko, "and tell us, without more ado, what you know."

But Sanderus again raised the flask to his lips, emptied it completely, and, as if he had not heard Macko's words, again addressed Zbyszko.

"Sanderus," said he, "will never be ungrateful! When misfortune befell you I told you I was about to proceed from castle to castle teaching the people, and that I would inquire concerning your loss. Whom have I not asked? Where have I not been? It would take me long to tell, but it is enough that I have found her. From that moment I stuck to old Siegfried like a burr to a jerkin. I made myself his servant, and followed him constantly until the last battle from castle to castle, from town to town, and from commandery to commandery."

Meanwhile Zbyszko had succeeded in mastering his emotion.

"I am grateful to you," he said, "and you will not be left without reward. But now answer me—will you swear by the salvation of your soul that she is still alive?"

"By the salvation of my soul, I swear it!" answered Sanderus earnestly.

"Why did Siegfried leave Szczytno?"

"I do not know, Pan, but can only guess. He never was Starosta of Szczytno, and when the Grand Master wrote ordering him to restore the captive to the Princess of Mazovia he may have been afraid. Perhaps he fled before the letter, for his soul was seared with the pain of Rotgier's death and by the longing for vengeance. They say Rotgier was his son, but this I do not know. I only know that his brain seems to be turned with fury, and that while he is alive he will never release Jurand's daughter."

"All this seems to me strange," said Macko suddenly, "for if this old hound is so incensed against Jurand's blood, he would surely slay her."

"He was about to do so," answered Sanderus, "but something strange happened to him, so that he fell dangerously ill and nearly died. There was much whispering about it among his men. Some say that, while going by night to the tower to murder the lady, Siegfried

met an evil spirit, but others say it was an angel. Howbeit, he was found lying senseless on the snow before the tower. Even now, when he thinks of it, his hair bristles with fear, and he does not dare to raise his hand against her or allow others to do so. He carries about with him the old dumb hangman of Szczytno, but no one knows why, for the hangman is no less afraid than others."

These words produced a great impression on Zbyszko, Macko, and the Bohemian, who now drew nearer Sanderus. Crossing himself, he continued:

"It is not well to be among them. Many a time have I heard things that make the flesh creep. I have already said that something is amiss with the old Komthur's head. How could it be otherwise, seeing that he is visited by spirits from the other world! If he is left alone, he hears a sound as of someone panting by his side. It is Danveld, whom the terrible Pan of Spychow slew. Then Siegfried says: 'Why are you here? To you masses are of no avail! Why, then, do you come?' But for answer Danveld only gnashes his teeth, and pants and snores again. But Rotgier comes oftener, and leaves a smell of brimstone in the chamber. With him the Komthur speaks much. 'I cannot!' Siegfried says to Rotgier. 'I cannot! When I myself come, well! But now I cannot!' I have heard, too, that he has asked Rotgier: 'Will it give you any relief, my son?' Thus it goes on continually. For days he will not say a word to anyone, and agony seems written in his face. As to the litter, both he and the servant of the Order watch it assiduously, so that one may never see the lady."

"Do they use her harshly?" asked Zbyszko in a hollow voice.

"I will tell your worship the truth. I never heard any sound of beating or crying, but I have heard the most piteous singing, and at times something like the wailing of a bird."

"This is still worse!" said Zbyszko through his clenched teeth.

"It is enough!" said Macko, interrupting his further questions. "Tell us now of the battle. Did you see it? How did they escape, and what occurred to them afterwards?"

"I did see it," replied Sanderus. "When we were surrounded, the Knight Arnold, who is a veritable giant,

broke the circle and opened up a road by which the Komthur and a few men escaped with the litter borne by two horses. They were pursued, but Arnold turned against the pursuers three times, and checked them with great slaughter, he is a man of such terrible strength. Although wounded, he escaped after having secured the old Komthur's flight."

"But how could you see all this?" asked Macko.

"I saw it," answered Sanderus, "because I seized the tail of one of the horses carrying the litter, and fled with them until I received a kick in the belly from one of their hoofs. Then I swooned, and thus I got into the hands of your worshippers."

"You have been through that country," said Zbyszko presently, "so you must know it. What castles are there near here, and where could Siegfried and Arnold hide themselves?"

"There are no castles in the neighbourhood, for the whole country is a wild forest, and the high road has only lately been cut through it. I think, Pan, that Siegfried and Arnold must now be wandering in the woods, and will try either to return whence they came or to pass stealthily to the fortress to which we were going before this fatal battle."

Zbyszko mused profoundly for a time. Then, raising his head, he said:

"Hlawa, let the horses and grooms be ready; we must set out at once."

Without a word, the Bohemian hurried towards the horses, followed by Macko. Zbyszko turned to de Lorche, and, with the help of the Mazovian interpreter, said to him:

"I cannot ask you to help me against the men under whose banner you served; therefore you are free to go wheresoever you please."

"I cannot aid you with my sword," answered de Lorche, "for that would be contrary to chivalrous honour. And as to freedom, that also is impossible. I will remain your prisoner upon my word of honour, and will appear whenever and wherever you may order me. And in case of any mishap, remember that the Order will exchange for me any prisoner you may wish, for my family is not only powerful, but has done much for the Order."

They then embraced, and took leave of each other.

"I will go to Marienburg or to the Mazovian Court, so that you will know where to find me. Your messenger will say to me only the two words, 'Lorraine, Geldern!'"

"Good!" said Zbyszko. "I must yet go to Skirwoillo, that he may give you a sign which the Samogitians will respect."

So saying, he went off to the old commander, who readily gave the sign. He made no difficulties with regard to Zbyszko's departure, for he had no right to detain the knight, who belonged to another country, and served under him of his own free will. Moreover, he was grateful to him for his services in the last battle, so he took leave of him with good wishes and the hope that they should yet fight side by side in some great and decisive battle against the Knights of the Cross.

On hastening towards his retinue he found everything in readiness. Among the men he saw Macko, already mounted and armed with a coat of mail and wearing a helm on his head.

"Then you, too, purpose setting out with me?" said Zbyszko, approaching him.

"What else should I do?" said Macko a little angrily.

The young knight said nothing in answer, but kissed his uncle's mailed right hand. He then mounted his horse, and they started. Sanderus rode with them, to act as their guide beyond the battlefield. They also expected that if they should meet with any peasants in the woods, these, hating their Teuton rulers, would be able to help them to find the old Komthur Siegfried and the Knight Arnold von Baden, of whose strength and courage Sanderus had spoken.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE band soon reached the scene of the battle. As they rode by they startled great numbers of wolves, ravens, and daws, which had been attracted by the corpses of the slain. They then began to search for traces on the track. Although the whole detachment had already passed over the ground, Macko was able to distinguish the marks of immense hoofs proceeding in the opposite direction.

"Fortunately," said he to his nephew, "there has been no rain since the fight. Arnold's horse, carrying a very big man, must have been big also. Then, while galloping in flight, it must have made deeper marks with its feet than when going slowly in this direction. With God's help, we will track these whelps, if only they do not find shelter behind walls."

"Sanderus said that there are no castles in the neighbourhood," answered Zbyszko. "Where, then, can they take shelter? If only we do not spare the horses, we shall overtake them."

"The Knight Arnold," interrupted Sanderus, "was wounded in the battle. Thus they cannot escape very swiftly, and perhaps they may be compelled to rest."

"You said there were no men with them?" asked Macko.

"Besides the Knight Arnold and the old Komthur, there are two, who carry the litter between their saddles. There was also a handful of others, but these were overtaken by the Samogitians and slain."

"Our grooms will bind the men who guard the litter," said Zbyszko; "you, uncle, will seize old Siegfried, and I will attack Arnold."

"I shall manage Siegfried," said Macko, "for—Christ be praised!—there is still some strength in my old bones. But do not you be too confident, for they say Arnold is a giant."

"Pshaw!" replied Zbyszko, "we shall see! Rotgier, too, was not a man to trifle with!"

"If God only grant us success," said Macko, "then let us get back to our Mazovian forests! There we shall be safe, and all will be well at last!"

But presently he sighed, thinking that all might not yet be over, and that it would still be necessary to do something with the unhappy Jagienka.

"Ah!" he muttered, "the decrees of Heaven are strange. I have often thought why it should not have been your destiny to be married quietly, and to have me by your side. Of the nobility of our kingdom, none but ourselves are wandering through pathless tracts in strange lands, instead of husbanding peaceably at home."

"It is true," answered Zbyszko, "but such is God's will!"

For a time they rode along in silence. Presently the old knight said:

"Do you trust this vagabond? Who is he?"

"He is a careless rogue enough, but he wishes me well, and I fear no treachery from him."

"Then let him ride in front; if he overtakes them they will not be startled. Let him tell them that he has escaped from us, and they will easily believe him. Were they to discover our approach from a distance they might either conceal themselves or prepare for defence."

"At night he will not ride in front alone, for he is timorous," answered Zbyszko. "But in the daytime he will do so. I will order him to stop three times a day and wait for us; if at the stopping-place we do not find him, we shall understand that he is already with them, and that by following his traces we shall be able to come upon them suddenly. I will also tell him that when we attack them we shall bind him too, so that he may not have to dread their vengeance afterwards."

"What! You mean to leave those men alive!"

"How can it be otherwise?" asked Zbyszko, somewhat perplexed. "Elsewhere I would challenge them, but here it is impossible. We must only take Danusia and hasten back. Besides, we may overtake them unarmed. How then could we kill them?"

"True," said Macko sorrowfully; "still, perhaps it may yet come to a fight."

"What I should like best," said Zbyszko, knitting his

brows, "would be to throw that hound Siegfried at Jurand's feet. May God grant it!"

"Yes, may God grant it!" repeated Macko.

At night they encamped about half a furlong's distance from the road. After refreshing themselves with food and drink, they lay down to rest on skins by the side of a small fire lit by the side of a tree trunk which had been thrown down by the wind. As soon as the first gleams of morning covered the trees with silver, Zbyszko started up and roused the others. They at once set out on their further march, following the traces left by the enormous hoofs of Arnold's stallion, which were easily distinguishable, as the drought had dried them into the usually swampy ground. Sanderus rode on in front and disappeared. Midway between sunrise and noon they overtook him at his first stopping-place. He said he had encountered no one except a peasant beekeeper, but although he had tried to ask him various things, they had failed to understand each other.

During the next stage Zbyszko began to grow uneasy. He reflected that if the pursuit should be long and lead them into a more populous country where the people were accustomed to obey the Knights of the Cross, then it might be almost impossible to rescue Danusia. At the next stopping-place, however, they did not find Sanderus, but on the bark of a pine tree standing by the roadside they saw a big mark in the form of a cross. It had evidently been newly made. They looked at one another solemnly, and their hearts began to beat faster.

On examining the marks on the ground they saw that Sanderus had ridden into the forest, following the track of the big hoofs, which, although not so deep as on the high road, were still sufficiently distinct. To Zbyszko's sharp eyes there were also other imprints visible. He and Macko therefore mounted their horses, and, with the Bohemian, began deliberating in low tones, as if the enemy were close at hand. Grooms were sent on in front to warn them if they should see anyone. The others then set out into the forest. A second mark on a pine tree soon assured them that they had not lost trace of Sanderus. Presently they observed that they were on a forest path, which seemed to have been used by many people, and which, they felt sure, must lead to some forest settlement.

The sun was beginning to sink, and shone like gold among the trees. Zbyszko, Macko, Hlawa, and the grooms rode one behind the other. The old knight knew that the grooms on foot were a long way in front, and would be sure to bring them timely warning.

"Reckoning by the sun," said he, "Sanderus must already be among them, and must have told them his adventures. If only he do not betray us!"

"He will not betray us," answered Zbyszko.

"And if only they believe him!" continued Macko. "For if they do not, it will go hard with him. Besides, if he tells them he is flying from captivity, they may be afraid of pursuit, and set out again at once."

"No. He knows how to throw dust in their eyes. Besides, they must know that he would not be pursued so far."

For a time they rode on in silence. Presently it seemed to Macko that Zbyszko was whispering something to him, and he turned and asked him what he had said. But Zbyszko's eyes were raised upwards; he was not whispering to Macko, but was recommending Danusia and his own enterprise to heaven. Macko also crossed himself, but he had scarcely done so when one of the grooms who had gone on in front suddenly came out of the thicket and approached them.

"At the pitch-burners!" he exclaimed. "They are there!"

"Halt!" said Zbyszko in a low tone, and leaped from his horse.

Macko, the Bohemian, and the grooms also dismounted. Three of the latter were ordered to stay with the horses to watch them and see that they did not neigh.

"Doubtless there will be two attendants and Sanderus," said Macko to the others. "You will at once bind them, and should any of them be armed and defend themselves, then strike them dead."

The company then started. As they went, Zbyszko again whispered to his uncle:

"You will take Siegfried, and I Arnold."

"Yes, but have a care!" answered the old man. And he gave a sign to the Bohemian that he must be ready to help his young master at any moment. Hlawa nodded to signify that he understood. He then felt his sword to see that it was loose in its scabbard,

"No," said Zbyszko, who had observed the movement. "I order you to rush towards the litter immediately, and not to stir a step from it during the fight."

Quickly and noiselessly they made their way through the thicket, but after proceeding two furlongs they stopped, for they had reached a small meadow, in which they saw the extinguished heaps of the pitch-burners, and two earthen huts in which the workers had lived until they had been driven out by the war. The setting sun shone brightly over the meadow. Seated on a log before one of the huts, which lay a considerable distance apart, were two knights, while in front of the other could be seen a broad-shouldered, red-haired churl and Sanderus. The latter were engaged polishing cuirasses with rags, and at Sanderus' feet lay two swords, which he was apparently about to clean.

"See!" said Macko, squeezing Zbyszko's shoulder. "He has taken their swords and cuirasses on purpose! That is well! That grey-haired man must be——"

"Forward!" shouted Zbyszko suddenly.

They rushed across the meadow like a whirlwind. The knights started to their feet, but before they could reach Sanderus, Macko had seized old Siegfried by the shoulders and thrown him backwards. In another moment he had him beneath him. Zbyszko and Arnold grappled like a couple of hawks. The broad-shouldered German who had been sitting by the side of Sanderus seized one of the swords, but, ere he could use it, Macko's groom, Wit, brought him to the ground with a blow from an axe. They then hastened to bind Sanderus, who, although well aware that this had been agreed upon before, began bellowing like a yearling calf whose throat is about to be cut.

Although strong, Zbyszko felt as if he were being hugged by a bear. He thought that but for his cuirass the German giant must have crushed his ribs or broken his backbone. Yet he, too, crushed Arnold with such terrible effect that the German's eyes at length filled with blood, whereupon, placing his legs between his opponent's knees, Zbyszko succeeded in throwing him to the ground. The youth, however, fell beneath; but Macko, leaving Siegfried to one of the grooms, rushed towards the struggling men, and bound Arnold's legs fast with a girdle. He then sat upon him as on a slain boar, and placed the

sharp point of his sword to his throat. The German called out loudly as if with pain, for he had been wounded in the battle with Skirwoillo; he relaxed his grasp of Zbyszko, who sat up on the ground. But he was unable to rise; his face was pale and covered with sweat, his lips were livid, and his eyes too were filled with blood.

"Are you hurt?" asked Macko in alarm.

"No; I am only exhausted. Help me to stand up."

Macko placed his hands under Zbyszko's armpits and raised him up.

"Can you stand?"

"Yes."

"Does anything hurt you?"

"Nothing; only I lack breath."

Meanwhile Hlawa appeared at the door of one of the huts holding the servant of the Knights of the Cross by the nape of her neck. At the sight of her, Zbyszko, forgetting all his exhaustion, rushed towards them.

"Danusia! Danusia!" he cried wildly.

But no voice was heard in answer.

"Danusia! Danusia!" he repeated.

Then he was silent. It was dark within the hut, and at first he could see nothing. But from behind a pile of stones heaped before the hearth he heard the sound of quick, loud breathing, like that of some small animal.

"Danusia! By heaven! It is I, Zbyszko!" he cried.

Suddenly, through the darkness, he saw her eyes. They were wide open, awe-stricken—senseless.

He rushed towards her and seized her in his arms. But she did not recognise him at all, and tearing herself from his grasp, she exclaimed in a hoarse whisper:

"I am afraid! I am afraid!"

PART VIII.

CHAPTER LVIII.

NEITHER caresses, nor adjurations, nor soothing words were of any avail. Danusia did not recognise anyone, and did not recover her senses. Her whole being seemed to be overcome by a feeling of dread, like that shown by a snared bird. When Zbyszko entered the chamber she at once ran into a corner, and hid herself behind a bundle of dry hops. It was in vain that he stretched out his arms and implored her, in a voice broken with grief, to come to him. She would not leave her hiding-place even when a fire had been kindled in the room and she could easily discern Zbyszko's features. It seemed that her memory had forsaken her with her reason. He looked upon her wasted face, her hollow eyes, and her ragged garments with terror, and his heart raged with pain at the thought of the hands she had been in and the treatment she had received. At length, in a fit of madness, he seized a sword and rushed upon Siegfried, whom he would certainly have killed had not Macko grasped him by the arm. They wrestled together almost like enemies, but the youth was so weakened by his fight with Arnold that the old knight soon overpowered him.

"Are you mad?" he cried.

"Let me be!" answered Zbyszko, gnashing his teeth; "let me be, or my heart will break!"

"Let it break, then! I will prevent this! Better break your head against a tree than bring ignominy upon yourself and our whole house!"

He crushed his nephew's hand as in a vice, and continued threateningly:

"Bethink yourself! To stab a fettered knight will not help Danusia, and will bring you nothing but infamy. Bethink yourself, I say!"

"Let me be!" said Zbyszko moodily after a silence.
"I will not strike him."

"Come to the fire, and let us speak of it."

He led him by the hand towards the fire, which had been kindled by the domestics near the pitch-heaps. Having sat down, Macko mused a little, and then said:

"Remember, too, that you have promised this old hound to Jurand. Jurand will avenge on him his own and Danusia's torments. He will repay him, have no fear! What you do not dare, Jurand may do, for he will receive Siegfried as a gift from you. Without either ignominy or blame, he may even flay him alive."

"You are right," answered Zbyszko submissively.

"Remember also that you have vowed vengeance on Lichtenstein and other Knights of the Cross. If you slew a defenceless prisoner no knight would accept your challenge. God forbid it! We have had no lack of misfortune, but at least may no infamy fall upon us! At present we had better consider what we are to do and where we are to go."

"What do you advise?" asked the youth.

"I would first advise that the viper who has attended upon Danusia should be given up to Prince Janusz to be tried by the Mazovian Courts. They will surely break her upon the wheel, unless they wish to offend God's justice. But until we find some other woman to take care of Danusia she is necessary. Afterwards we may tie her to a horse's tail. But now we must hasten on to the Mazovian forests."

"Not now, for it is night. Besides, Danusia may have partly recovered her senses by to-morrow."

"Yes, and the horses too must rest well. We shall start at daybreak."

Their conversation was interrupted by the voice of Arnold von Baden, who was lying on his back at a distance, bound to his own sword. He had called out something in German, and Macko rose up and went over to him. Being unable to understand the stranger's tongue well, he looked about for the Bohemian.

But Hlawa was occupied, and could not come at once. During the conversation by the fire he had approached the servant of the Order, and, laying his hand on her neck and shaking her like a pear-tree, said:

"Listen to me, she-hound! Go to the hut and make a

bed of skins for the lady; but first dress her in your clothes, and you, put on the rags you have given her—may your mother be cursed!”

And again he shook her so violently that her eyes nearly started from their sockets.

“And afterwards we shall find for you the branch of a tree!” he said.

The woman fell at his feet in terror, but he spurned her with his foot. She rushed into the hut, and, casting herself down before Danusia, cried:

“Protect me! Keep them from me!”

But Danusia only closed her eyes, and from her lips came only the panting whisper:

“I am afraid! I am afraid!”

She then became quite stark and stiff, an effect which the servant's presence always produced upon her. She allowed herself to be undressed and clothed in the newer dress worn by the woman. The latter then prepared the couch, and laid Danusia upon it like a wooden or wax figure. She herself sat by the fire, not daring to leave the hut.

Presently the Bohemian entered, and, addressing Danusia, said:

“Panna, you are among friends! In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then, sleep in peace!”

And he made the sign of the cross over her. Then, without raising his voice lest he should startle her, he said to the servant:

“You will lie bound outside before the threshold, but if you make a noise or frighten the lady, I will at once break your neck. Rise and come!”

Leading her out of the hut, he bound her securely, and then went to Zbyszko and told him what he had done.

“I will lie at the threshold of the hut,” said Zbyszko.

“Then I will draw the she-hound aside. But at present you must eat, for you have a long way and many hardships before you.”

So saying, he went to the wallets to get the smoked viands which they contained, but ere he could lay the provisions before Zbyszko, Macko summoned him over towards Arnold.

“See what this giant wants,” said the knight, “for though I know some German, I cannot understand what this man means.”

"I will carry him to the fire, and there you can speak with him, Pan," answered Hlawa. And ungirding himself, he placed the girdle under Arnold's shoulders, and pulled the German over his back. Although he bent beneath the weight, he easily carried him to the fire, where he threw him down at Zbyszko's side like a sack of peas.

"Remove my fetters," said the Knight of the Cross.

"That may be done," said Macko, with the aid of Hlawa, "if you swear upon your honour to remain our prisoner. Still, even now, we will loosen everything except the ropes on your feet, until we have spoken further with each other."

He signed to the Bohemian to cut the bonds with which the German's hands were tied, and helped the prisoner to sit upright. Arnold looked haughtily on Macko and Zbyszko, and asked angrily:

"Who are you?"

"How dare you ask? How does that concern you? What of yourself?"

"It concerns me, for I can swear upon my honour only before knights."

"Then look!"

And drawing aside his mantle, Macko showed him the knight's girdle about his waist. At the sight of it, the prisoner appeared greatly astonished.

"How so?" he said. "And yet you rob and plunder in the forest, and help heathens against Christians!"

"You lie!" exclaimed Macko.

Then began a conversation which often approached to a quarrel. But when Macko angrily exclaimed that it was the Order which prevented the Lithuanians from becoming Christians and brought forward proofs of his assertion, Arnold was again astonished, the more so as he found it impossible to deny its truth.

"Who knows whom you really serve!" said Macko, making the sign of the cross. "If not all of you, then at least some!"

Arnold was greatly influenced by the knight's words, for he well knew that things of evil report were whispered among the brothers of the Order. Macko alarmed the simple-minded giant still further by mentioning the strange behaviour of the old Komthur, which he had learnt from Sanderus.

"And Siegfried, by whose side you intend to fight,

serves God and Christ!" he exclaimed. "Have you never heard that he communes with evil spirits—that he whispers and smiles to them, gnashing his teeth?"

"That is true!" muttered Arnold.

"And you speak of knightly honour!" interrupted Zbyszko, his heart bursting anew with grief and anger. "Shame upon you, for you have helped a hangman and a worshipper of the devil! Shame upon you, for you looked on while a defenceless woman—a knight's daughter—was tormented, if, indeed, you did not torment her yourself! Shame upon you, I say!"

Arnold stared at him in astonishment, and crossed himself.

"In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—what do you mean? That mad damsel, in whose head live twenty-seven devils! . . . You say that I——"

"Fire and blood!" exclaimed Zbyszko hoarsely. And seizing the hilt of a sword, he again looked wildly towards Siegfried, who lay in the darkness some distance off.

Macko laid his hand on his nephew's shoulder to restrain him and restore his presence of mind. Then addressing Arnold, he said:

"The woman is the daughter of Jurand of Spychow, and the wife of this young knight. Do you now comprehend why we pursued you, and why you are now our prisoner?"

"By heaven!" said Arnold. "How comes it so? She is confused in mind."

"Because the Knights of the Cross seized her like an innocent lamb, and drove her mad with their cruelty."

Great tears of grief dropped one after another from Zbyszko's eyes. Arnold sat musingly, while the Bohemian told him in a few words the facts of Danveld's treachery, Danusia's abduction, Jurand's torture, and the combat with Rotgier. There was a long silence when he had finished. At length Arnold raised his head and spoke.

"By my honour and by the cross of Christ," he said, "I swear to you that I have scarcely once set eyes upon the lady, and that I have never in any way lent my countenance to her maltreatment!"

"Then swear also," said Macko, "that you will follow us freely and will not try to escape, and you will be completely unbound."

"Be it so. I swear! Whither will you take me?"

"To Mazovia—to Jurand of Spychow!" And as he spoke, Macko himself cut the rope which bound the German's feet, and invited him to partake of the viands.

Zbyszko rose after a time, and went off to lie down at the entrance of the hut. He resolved to remain awake to learn whether the daybreak would not bring some happy change to Danusia.

"And you, Pan, will you not also rest?" asked Hlawa, seeing that Arnold had fallen asleep.

"Sleep flies from my eyelids," answered Macko, gazing sadly at the stars.

"I, too, cannot sleep, for the Panienska of Zgorzelice sticks in my head."

"Ah, that is true! Another sorrow! And she is in Spychow."

"Yes, in Spychow. We have taken her from Zgorzelice—God knows why!"

"She wished it herself," answered Macko impatiently, for he did not like to speak of it, though in his heart he knew he was to blame.

"Yes; but what is to be done now?"

"If only Danusia were in good health and like other people, we should at least know what to do. But as it is, God only knows. She may neither recover her health nor die. May the Lord Jesus grant at least one or other!"

"You see, your worship," said Hlawa, whose thoughts were with Jagienka, "when I took leave of her in Spychow she said that if anything should happen I was to come to her before Zbyszko or you with the news, so that I might take her back to Zgorzelice."

"Then you had better set out before us. Besides, it is well that Jurand should be informed that his daughter is found, lest sudden joy should kill him. Return, then, and say that we have rescued Danusia, and that we are bringing her with us. Then take poor Jagienka, and bring her home."

The old knight sighed, for he was truly sorry for Jagienka, and regretted his own former designs.

"You are both strong and shrewd," he went on, "but will you be able to guard the girl from all injury and mishap by the way? Do not be over confident. Remember, too, that at Zgorzelice you will have to beware of the Wilks of Brzozowa and of Cztan of Rogow. . . . But I am talking foolishly, for that was necessary only while

we had something else in mind. Now there is no hope, and what is to be will be."

"I will guard the Panienska from those knights also, for the poor wife of Pan Zbyszko scarcely breathes. In case she should die——"

"By heaven, it is true! She scarcely breathes! If she should die——"

"That we must leave in God's hands! And now we must think only of the Panienska of Zgorzelice."

"It were only just and right," said Macko, "that I myself should conduct her home. But I cannot leave Zbyszko alone. If, as you say, this maid should perish, I do not know whether even I shall be able to restrain him from killing the old Komthur. Were I to go, nothing could restrain him, and eternal ignominy would assuredly fall upon him and on our house, which God forbid! Amen!"

"Then," said Hlawa, "it may easily be avoided. Deliver the son of a hangman to me. I will not let him loose, but will drop him out of a sack in Spychow before Pan Jurand."

"God bless you!" exclaimed Macko joyfully. "You are a shrewd fellow! Take him with you, and do with him what you will, only bring him alive to Spychow."

"Give me also that she-hound from Szczytno. If she do not hinder me by the way, I will bring her alive likewise. Perhaps Danusia will forget her fears and recover her senses if she no longer sees them."

"But if you take away the servant she will be without any woman to attend her."

"In the forest you will meet some fugitive peasants with their wives. You will take one of them. Meanwhile Pan Zbyszko's care will suffice."

"You are right. She will surely recover sooner with Zbyszko constantly beside her. When do you set out?"

"Before daybreak. But for the present I will rest a little."

So saying, the Bohemian stretched himself out beside the extinguished fire, drew a shaggy skin over him, and instantly fell asleep. Some time before dawn he awoke, crept from under the skin, looked at the stars, and, after stretching his limbs, awoke Macko.

"It is time for me to start," said he.

"Whither," asked Macko, rubbing his eyes.

"To Spychow."

"Ah, yes! Who is it that snores so loudly? He might awake a dead man."

"It is the Knight Arnold. I will throw some branches on the fire, and will then go to the servants."

So saying, he went off; but in a little while he returned in haste, and cried loudly as he came:

"Pan, something has happened! Something bad!"

"What is amiss?" asked Macko, with a start.

"The servant has escaped. The grooms took her among the horses, but when they fell asleep she crept like a serpent from among them. Come here, Pan!"

Macko hurried with Hlawa towards the horses, but all the grooms except one had gone off in pursuit of the fugitive. It was useless, however, to search in the darkness, and the men soon returned with hanging heads.

Zbyszko, who had been unable to sleep in front of the hut, approached and asked what had happened. He received the news of the servant's escape calmly. Nor did he oppose Hlawa's departure with Siegfried, for everything which did not directly concern Danusia was indifferent to him.

"To-morrow," he said presently, "I will take her before me on my horse, so that we may be together."

"How is it with her now?" asked Macko. "Does she sleep?"

"Sometimes she moans a little, but I do not know whether she is asleep or awake. I will not go in lest she should be frightened."

"I must now go," said Hlawa to Zbyszko. "The horses are ready, and the old devil is tied to the saddle. It will soon be dawn. Remain with God, your worship!"

"Go with God, and farewell!"

But Hlawa drew Macko aside.

"I would also ask you, Pan," said he, "in case any misfortune should befall, to send a messenger instantly to Spychow; and if we should have gone from Spychow, let him follow us."

"I will," answered Macko. "I forgot also to tell you that you must bring Jagienka to Plock. Go to the bishop there, and tell him who she is. Say that she is the god-child of the abbot, whose last will is in the bishop's hands. Ask him to provide tutelage for her, for this, too, is mentioned in the testament."

“And if the bishop should require us to remain in Plock?”

“Obey him in all things, and follow his counsel.”

“So be it, Pan. God be with you!”

“And with you also!”

CHAPTER LIX.

NEXT day the Knight Arnold was informed of the servant's escape. He smiled almost imperceptibly, and remarked that she must either be devoured by wolves or slain by the Lithuanians. Nevertheless they searched for her, but without success.

Macko and Zbyszko intended to hasten on to Mazovia, and had made preparations to set out at sunrise. They could not do so, however, for Danusia had fallen into a deep sleep just before daybreak, and Zbyszko would not permit her to be roused. He had heard her moaning throughout the night, and now that she had fallen into a peaceful slumber, he expected that she would begin to mend. Twice he stole into the hut, and saw, by the light that penetrated the clefts between the beams, her closed eyes, her parted lips, and her flushed cheeks. Her sleep was like the deep sleep of a child. At the sight of her his heart melted, and from his soul he prayed that God would grant her rest and good health.

"Your distress and weeping are now past," he murmured, "and if the merciful Lord Jesus grant it we shall yet enjoy happiness inexhaustible as a river!"

For a moment he thought of making a votive offering to God, but as he did not know whether Danusia would awake in health or recover her senses, he felt uncertain whether he should have any cause for gratitude, and he therefore resolved to await the issue.

Meanwhile the grooms and pack-horses were kept in readiness. When noon came Danusia was still asleep, and Macko began to grow uneasy. Zbyszko again entered the hut, and sitting down on the trunk of a tree, gazed steadfastly at Danusia's face. Presently her lips trembled a little, and, without opening her eyes, she whispered, as if, nevertheless, aware of her lover's presence:

"Zbyszko!"

He at once threw himself at her feet, seized her wasted hands, and, kissing them rapturously, exclaimed in a voice broken with emotion:

"Heaven be praised! Danusia! You know me at last!"

The sound of his voice completely awoke her. She sat up on the bed, and opening her eyes, repeated:

"Zbyszko!"

Then, alternately closing and opening her eyes, she gazed about her as if amazed.

"You are no longer in captivity!" said Zbyszko. "I have wrested you from their hands, and we are now on our way to Spychow!"

But she drew her hands away from his grasp.

"This has come about," said she, "because we had not my father's permission! Where is the Princess?"

"Awake, my darling! The Princess is far from here. We have rescued you from the Germans!"

"They took away my lute, and shattered it against the wall," she said, as if recollecting something.

"By heaven!" he exclaimed.

For now he saw that her eyes glistened with an absent look, and that her cheeks were burning. Only then the thought flashed through his mind that she had merely seen him in her delirium, and had therefore pronounced his name. At the thought his heart throbbed with anguish, and a cold sweat covered his brow.

"Danusia!" he cried. "Danusia! Do you see me? Do you understand me?"

"Something to drink!" she answered in a tone of humble request. "Water! Water!"

"Merciful Jesus!" cried Zbyszko in alarm, and rushed from the hut. At the door he brushed past old Macko, who had come to learn how the sick girl was. Without stopping an instant, and uttering the one word "Water!" he ran to the stream that flowed close by in the thicket. He soon returned with a vessel full of water, and handed it to Danusia, who drank it eagerly.

"Is she in a fever?" asked Macko gloomily.

"Yes," groaned Zbyszko.

"Does she understand what you say?"

"No."

"What, then, is to be done?" asked the old man, with knitted brows.

"I pledge my word!" answered Macko. Then, giving his name, he asked leave to enter the hut to warn his nephew, "lest he might do anything rash." Presently he reappeared with Zbyszko's sword in his hand.

"My nephew," said he, "has not even his sword by his side. He asks that until you set out he may remain with his wife."

"He may remain," said Arnold's brother. "We do not start at once, for the men are tired. I will have food and drink sent in to him. We beg you, Pan, to accompany us to supper."

So saying, they went towards the fire at which Macko had passed the night, but either from pride or churlishness—qualities common among the Knights of the Order—they allowed Macko to follow at their heels.

"Do you ask me as a guest or as a prisoner?" asked Macko.

Arnold's brother seemed seized with shame, for he stopped and said:

"Pass to the front, Pan."

The old knight advanced, but, not wishing to offend a man upon whom much might yet depend, he said:

"It is plain, Pan, that you are acquainted not only with different languages, but also with courtly manners."

"What is the matter, Wolfgang, and what is he saying?" asked Arnold, who understood but a few words.

"He speaks reasonably," answered Wolfgang, who was visibly flattered by Macko's words.

The lesson was not lost upon the Germans, for, when they sat down by the fire and food and drink were brought, Wolfgang had Macko served first. From the conversation, the old knight learned that Wolfgang, Arnold's younger brother, had been leading a body of foot soldiers to Gotteswerder against the Samogitians. As they came from a distant commandery, they were unable to overtake the cavalry. Arnold, however, knew that he should meet with other detachments from towns and castles nearer the Lithuanian frontier, and preferred not to wait for them. The younger brother had followed several days' march behind, and had thus almost reached the pitch-burners' huts on the night that the woman made her escape. It was she who had informed him of his brother's mishap.

"It is hard to fall into captivity," said Macko, anxious

to win the sympathy of the Germans, "but I nevertheless thank God for delivering me into your hands instead of others, for you are pious knights and mindful of chivalrous honour."

Hereupon Wolfgang closed his eyes and nodded his head with mingled dignity and pleasure.

"And you also know our language!" continued Macko. "Assuredly Heaven has given you wisdom for all things!"

"I know your language, because the people of Czluchowa speak Polish, and for seven years my brother and I have served under the Komthur of Czluchowa."

"And in due time you will obtain the command! It cannot be otherwise! . . . Still, your brother does not speak our tongue so well as you."

"He understands it a little, but cannot speak it. My brother is the stronger—though I am no weak-limbed fellow—but his wits are less quick."

"What!" exclaimed Macko. "It seems to me that he, too, is no fool!"

"What does he say, Wolfgang?" asked Arnold once more.

"He is praising you," answered Wolfgang.

"Indeed, I am," Macko went on, "for he is an honest knight. I tell you sincerely that I meant to set him free on his word of honour to-day, so that he might go wherever he wished, if only he came back within a year—a fit and proper custom among dubbed knights."

As he spoke, he looked closely at Wolfgang's face, but the latter only frowned.

"I also," he said, "might have acted thus, and released you on your word of honour, had not you aided those heathen dogs against us."

"It is not so!" answered Macko.

Then ensued a discussion such as had taken place on the previous day with Arnold. Although the old knight was in the right, it was now more difficult for him to convince his opponent, for Wolfgang was really more quick-witted than his brother. One good result of the discussion, however, was that the younger brother also learned about all the crimes of Szezytno and the misfortunes of the unhappy Danusia, and to the tale of these villainies he could find no reply. He was compelled to admit that their vengeance was just, and that the Polish knights were right in acting as they had done.

"By the blessed bones of Liborius!" he exclaimed at length. "I do not pity Danveld. They say he soiled himself with black magic, but God's power and justice are stronger than that. As for Siegfried, I know not whether he too served the devil, but I will not send after him, for I have no horsemen, and if he did torment the maid as you say, then he also must yet endure everlasting torment."

With these words he stretched out his limbs and added:

"God be with me in my dying hour!"

"But how will it be with the unhappy maid?" asked Macko. "Will not you allow her to be taken home? Is she to draw her last breath in your dungeons? Remember God's anger!"

"I have nothing to do with her," answered Wolfgang roughly. "One of you may take her back to her father, if only he return afterwards, but more I cannot do."

"And if I swear to return by my honour and by the spear of Saint George?"

Wolfgang hesitated, for this was a great oath; but at the same moment Arnold inquired for the third time:

"What does he say?"

On being told the subject of their talk, he strenuously and churlishly opposed their liberation. He thought of his defeat in battle by Skirwoillo and in single combat by these Polish knights. He knew that he must appear before the Grand Master and the Marshal, and that it would be less shame to him if he had even one important captive to show than if he could merely say that he had taken two prisoners, however great.

From Arnold's exclamations and oaths, Macko saw that he must be content with what they were willing to grant, so, turning to Wolfgang, he said:

"Then one thing more I ask of you, Pan. My nephew will understand that it is right he should remain by his wife's side, and that I should stay with you. In any case, permit me to inform him that there is nothing now in dispute, seeing that such is your will."

"You may do so," answered Wolfgang. "We shall only discuss the ransom which your nephew must bring for himself and you. All depends upon that."

"The ransom?" asked Macko, who would have preferred to delay this discussion. "Have we not enough

time to speak of that? The word of a dubbed knight is as money. At Gotteswerder we took one of your chief knights, de Lorche by name, and my nephew—for it was he who captured him—set him free upon his word, without even treating about ransom at all.”

“De Lorche!” said Wolfgang eagerly. “Did you take the Knight de Lorche? I know him. He is a mighty knight, and is of a wealthy and famous family. You will do well by him! I am glad you have told me this, for now I do not mean to let you go for a trifle.”

Macko bit his moustache.

“We, too, know our worth!” he said, raising his head proudly.

“So much the better!” said the younger von Baden. “That is,” he added, “so much the better, not for us—for we are humble monks, who have made vows of poverty—but for our Order, which will use your money for God’s glory.”

To this Macko made no reply, but gave him a look as if to say: “Tell that to others!” They then began to discuss the terms of ransom. While he was exceedingly sensitive to every loss, Macko knew that it was not seemly for him to undervalue himself and Zbyszko. So he wriggled like an eel, for Wolfgang, though apparently humane and smooth-spoken, showed himself to be grasping and hard as stone. Macko’s one consolation was that de Lorche would pay for all. After long negotiations, he at last agreed to the amount and time of payment, and having stipulated how many grooms and horses Zbyszko was to take with him, he went off to tell his nephew the result. Fearing that the Germans might yet alter their minds, he advised him to set out at once.

“There is no help for it,” he said. “If God grant it, our turn will yet come. But lose no time now. If you go quickly you will overtake Hlawa, and you will be safer together. In Mazovia you will surely be received hospitably, and that may prove Danusia’s salvation.”

As he spoke, he looked at Danusia, who lay in a light slumber, breathing quickly and painfully. Her thin hands, lying on the dark bearskin, trembled feverishly. Making the sign of the cross over her, Macko said:

“Take her and go! May God mend her, for it seems to me she is wasting away!”

“Do not speak so!” cried Zbyszko desperately.

"It is in God's hands! I will have your horse brought, so that you may start."

Leaving the hut, he made all the arrangements for the departure. Presently the young knight carried Danusia from the hut in his arms. On seeing her almost childlike form, her face like that of some saintly maid, and her weakness, which was so great that she had to lean her head on Zbyszko's shoulder—on seeing this, the brothers looked at each other in astonishment, and with anger in their hearts against the authors of her distress.

"Surely Siegfried has the heart of a hangman, not of a knight!" whispered Wolfgang. "I will have that viper of a servant flogged, though by her help you are here."

After placing Danusia in the litter, Zbyszko approached his uncle and kissed his hand. Macko, although unwilling to show his emotion before the Germans, was nevertheless unable to restrain himself, and embraced him tenderly, kissing the youth's luxuriant golden hair.

"May God protect you!" he said. "But you will not forget your old uncle, for captivity is hard to bear!"

"I will not forget you," answered Zbyszko.

"May the Holy Virgin comfort you!"

"God reward you for this and for everything!"

The horses started and soon disappeared in the hazel thicket. Macko was instantly oppressed with sadness and loneliness, and his thoughts followed the beloved youth upon whom the hopes of his family depended. He quickly threw off his grief, however, for his strength and self-possession were great.

"Thanks be to God!" he exclaimed. "It is not he who is in captivity, but I."

Then, turning to Wolfgang, he said:

"And you, Pan, when do you start, and whither?"

"Whenever we are ready; we shall go to Marienburg, where you, Pan, must appear before the Grand Master."

"And there," said Macko to himself, "they will probably cut off my head for helping the Samogitians."

Yet he was relieved by the thought that de Lorche was his hostage, and that the von Badens themselves would defend his life, if only that they might not lose the ransom. And he was further comforted by the reflection that Zbyszko might not be obliged either to appear or lessen their estate.

CHAPTER LX.

ZBYSZKO was unable to overtake Hlawa, for the groom rode day and night, resting only as much as was necessary to keep the horses from breaking down. Hlawa did not spare himself, nor did he heed Siegfried's great age and weakness. The old Knight of the Cross suffered cruelly, the more so as Macko had already damaged his bones. His chief misery, however, was caused by the gnats which swarmed in the swampy forest, and from which he was unable to protect himself, for his hands were tied together, and his feet were bound beneath his horse's belly. Although Hlawa did not inflict any special torment upon him, he did not show him any kindness. He released his right arm only at stopping-places, in order that he might take his food.

"Eat, wolf's snout!" Hlawa would exclaim at such times. "Eat, that I may bring you alive to the Pan of Spychow!"

The thought of starving himself to death often occurred to Siegfried, but when Hlawa threatened to force the food down his throat he resolved to yield, so that the dignity of the Order might not suffer such a humiliation.

The Bohemian felt that he must arrive in Spychow well in advance of his master, in order that his adored mistress might not be humbled by being there with Danusia.

"I may tell the Bishop of Plock," he reflected, "that it was fitting that the old Pan, her guardian, should take her with him. I can let everyone know that she is under the bishop's tutelage, and that she will inherit his estates as well as Zgorzelice; then, even a palatine's son will not be too good for her."

Before his eyes, too, appeared the vision of Sieciech's daughter, Anulka, with her cheeks as rosy as a ripe apple, and he spurred his horse anew, for his longing for Spychow was now irresistible.

He knew that by riding constantly southward and a little to the west he must reach Mazovia, and that then all would be well. By day he was guided by the sun, and, when the march was continued at night, by the stars. The forest before them seemed boundless. Many a time Hlawa feared that the young knight would be unable to carry Danusia alive through the terrible wilderness, where no food was to be found, where the horses had to be guarded at night from wolves and bears, and where by day the traveller had to be constantly on the watch against attack by herds of bison, urus, and boars.

Sometimes the smoke of fires was seen, announcing the proximity of men. Hlawa frequently approached these settlements, but was met by wild people dressed in skins and armed with halberds and crossbows, who poured out of their huts and looked menacingly at the travellers. Hlawa's retinue took them for were-wolves and rode off at once, profiting by the astonishment which their appearance caused. Twice were spears hurled after them, and twice did they hear the cry of "Wokili!" ("Germans!") behind them. But they thought it wiser to make their escape rather than stay and explain who they were. At length, after travelling further for several days, they encountered some settlers who spoke Polish, and learnt that they were in Mazovian territory.

The peasants were full of curiosity, and crowded round the horsemen, troubling them with their questions. On learning that their prisoner was a Knight of the Cross, they clamoured to have him given up to them that they might destroy him. It was only when Hlawa explained that the prisoner belonged to the Prince that they gave way. The same difficulty was experienced later with the gentry and noblemen, who were imbued with a deep hatred of the Order. Their treachery and the injury done by its knights to the Prince at Zlotorja, in time of peace, were remembered everywhere. They did not wish to murder Siegfried, but many a sturdy nobleman said: "Set him free, and I will give him weapons and challenge him to mortal combat!" But in every case the Bohemian explained that the first right of vengeance lay with the unhappy Pan of Spychow, and that no one dared deprive him of that right.

The country being now more thickly inhabited, the journey was easier, for the horses could now be fed with

oats and barley instead of grass. They, therefore, rode on quickly without halting anywhere, and ten days before Corpus Christi they reached Spychow.

It was evening when they arrived. Jagienka saw Hlawa from the window, as she had done before when he had brought her the news of Macko's departure for Samogitia, and ran down to meet him. He fell at her feet, unable to speak a word. She raised him from the ground, and, not wishing to question him before the people, led him hastily upstairs.

"What news do you bring?" she asked, trembling with impatience and scarcely able to breathe. "Are they alive?—and in good health?"

"Alive! In good health!"

"And is she found?"

"She is found. They rescued her."

"Jesus Christ be praised!"

But as she spoke her face grew pale and torpid, for all her hopes were scattered like dust. Yet she did not completely lose her strength or presence of mind, and presently she mastered her feelings and asked:

"When will they be here?"

"In a few days. It is a hard journey with a sick woman."

"Is she sick?"

"She is broken with torture. Her torments have turned her brain."

"Merciful Jesus!"

There was silence for a few moments, and Jagienka's pale lips moved as if in prayer.

"Did she recover with Zbyszko by her side?" she asked again.

"Perhaps, but I do not know, for I rode off at once to tell you the news before they should arrive here."

"God have mercy! Tell me all you know!"

The Bohemian then narrated shortly how they had rescued Danusia and captured Arnold and Siegfried. He mentioned, also, that he had brought Siegfried with him in order that Jurand might wreak vengeance on him.

"I must now go to Jurand!" said Jagienka when he had done.

Shortly after she had gone, Sieciech's daughter, Anulka, came from the next room, and Hlawa clasped her in his arms. She was so astonished that she did not resist his

embrace. Almost immediately steps were heard on the stairs, and presently Father Kaleb entered the room.

On hearing the news confirmed that Danusia had been found and rescued, and her tormentor brought to Spychow, the old priest fell on his knees and thanked God.

"God has not saved her," said he, after hearing Hlawa's story, "to leave her understanding and her soul in darkness and in the possession of evil powers. Jurand will lay his holy hands upon her, and will restore her senses and her health by means of a single prayer."

"The Knight Jurand?" asked Hlawa with astonishment. "Does he indeed possess such power? Has he already become a saint?"

"He is a saint before God while he yet lives, and when he dies we shall have one more patron saint and martyr in heaven."

"You have said, reverend father, that he will lay hands on his daughter's head. Has his right hand grown again, then, for I know that you prayed for its recovery?"

"I said 'hands,' as is customary," answered the priest, "but with God's mercy one will suffice."

"Assuredly!" answered Hlawa.

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Jagienka.

"I told him the news cautiously," she said, "lest sudden joy should kill him. He at once stretched himself out on the floor in the form of a cross, and is now praying."

"He is often thus," said Father Kaleb. "He will not rise now until morning."

And so it was. Although they repeatedly entered his chamber they found him lying, not asleep, but praying as if in an ecstasy. The watchman in the tower afterwards related that he had seen a strange brightness in the old Pan's room that night.

It was not until late on the following morning, when Jagienka entered, that Jurand expressed his wish to see Hlawa and the prisoner. Siegfried was therefore led from the dungeon, his hands bound across his breast, and all followed Tolima into Jurand's room.

The day was cloudy, and but little light penetrated the film windows. When Hlawa's eyes had become accustomed to the darkness he scarcely recognised Jurand, he was so worn and emaciated. Close to his chair stood a table bearing a crucifix, a jug of water, and a loaf of brown

bread with a sword sticking in it—a short sword such as was used by knights to slay the wounded. His dress was of rough hair-cloth, worn next his naked body and girded with a rope.

On hearing the people enter, Jurand thrust aside the tame she-wolf that was warming his bare feet, and leaned backwards. He then sat motionless, pale and calm, his lips slightly parted. To Hlawa it seemed as if he were already plunged in the eternal sleep of death.

"Here is Hlawa," said Jagienka at length. "Do you wish to hear him?"

He nodded to signify his assent, and for the third time the Bohemian told his tale. He purposely concealed the fact that Danusia had lost her senses during her captivity. On the other hand, being infuriated against the Knights of the Cross, and desiring that the vengeance on Siegfried should be as merciless as possible, he did not conceal her sufferings at their cruel hands. As Hlawa spoke, his words were accompanied by the thunder of the approaching storm, and masses of brazen clouds rolled in ever-increasing volume over Spychow.

Jurand listened to the story without stirring. Yet he heard and understood all, for when Hlawa began to speak of Danusia's distress two big tears gathered in the empty sockets of his eyes and ran down his cheeks. Presently his lips began to move as if in prayer. Outside the thunder still pealed in the distance, and the flash of the lightning could be seen through the windows. The continued silence within the room began to oppress those present, for they did not know what was about to happen. At length old Tolima spoke.

"Before you, Pan," said he, "stands the Teuton were-wolf who tortured you and your child! Give me a sign so that I may know how he is to be punished."

At these words Jurand's face seemed to lighten, and he signed that the prisoner should be brought close to him. When this had been done he stretched out his arm and passed his hand over Siegfried's face, as if to impress his features on his memory for the last time. He lowered his hand and felt the arms bound across the breast, and touched the rope. Then, closing his eyelids again, he leaned his head backwards. For a time he seemed to meditate. Then he started and carried his hand towards the loaf in which the terrible sword was sticking.

At this Jagienka, Hlawa, and even old Tolima held their breath. Vengeance was just, and the punishment was deserved a hundred times. But at the thought of the old knight, in his blindness, slaughtering the fettered prisoner, they shuddered. Jurand seized the short sword by the middle, and passed his finger along the blade. Then he began to cut the ropes about the German's shoulders. All were filled with astonishment. They understood his wish, but could not believe their eyes. This action was too much for them.

"Brother Jurand," said the priest at length, his voice broken with weeping, "what do you wish? Is it your will that he be set free?"

Jurand bowed his head in assent.

"Without punishment or vengeance?"

Again Jurand bowed his head.

A murmur of anger and indignation spread through the chamber, but Father Kaleb, anxious to turn such an unheard-of deed of mercy to account, turned towards some who had thus given vent to this dissatisfaction, and exclaimed:

"Who dares oppose the saint? Down on your knees!"

He fell on his own knees and began to pray:

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. . . ." And thus he recited the whole of the Lord's Prayer. At the words: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," he turned his face involuntarily towards Jurand, whose features seemed to be illumined by a divine radiance.

This sight and the words of the prayer softened the hearts of all present. Although old Tolima's heart had been hardened by incessant fighting, he crossed himself and knelt at Jurand's feet.

"If your will is to be performed, Pan," he said, "then we must lead the prisoner to the border?"

Jurand nodded his head.

The lightning was increasing, its flashes illuminating the room more and more frequently. The storm was fast approaching.

CHAPTER LXI.

SIEGFRIED and Tolima rode through the tempest towards the boundaries of Spychow. The latter accompanied the German to preserve him from the vengeance of Jurand's dependants. Siegfried was without weapons, but he was now unbound. Driven by the wind, the storm was already upon them. From time to time the thunder pealed over their heads, startling the horses. The two men rode in perfect silence through a hollow defile, so close to one another that their stirrups sometimes touched. When they reached the edge of the forest of Spychow the rain ceased and the clouds shone with a strange yellow light. Here Tolima was seized with a temptation.

"I was to lead this mad hound safely to the frontier," said he to himself. "I have done so. But must he be set free without punishment—this tormentor of my lord and his child? Were it not a worthy deed, and one agreeable to God, to slay him? Or might I not challenge him to mortal combat? He is weaponless, but at Pan Warcim's manor, but a mile distant, he could be provided with sword and spear."

The thought that, were he to take Siegfried's life, the holy deed of the Pan would be frustrated and the reward of heaven diminished, enabled him to resist the temptation. At length he reined in his horse.

"Here is our frontier," said he to Siegfried. "Yours is not far off. Proceed in freedom! If remorse does not choke you, or God's lightning strike you, then nothing threatens you at the hands of men!"

With these words he turned back. Siegfried rode on without answering a word. In his face there was a wild, stony look. He did not seem to have heard. He rode on as if plunged in sleep.

The track now widened. The sky again became overcast as if night were about to fall. The storm

was again approaching. Overhead the thunder growled and rumbled, and the lightning flashed across the threatening sky, illuminating the highway bordered by its two black walls of forest. Half-conscious and consumed by fever, Siegfried rode along. The sorrow which had devoured his soul since Rotgier's death, the crimes with which he had avenged it, his remorse, his awful visions—these things had long perturbed his mind to such a degree that it was only by the greatest effort that he could preserve himself from madness. At times he even succumbed to it. More recently, the hardships of his journey with Hlawa, the night he had passed in the dungeon of Spychow, the uncertainty of his fate, and the unexampled—almost superhuman—act of mercy of which he had been the object, and which had overawed him—all this had completely broken his spirit. In his fevered mind he had a feeling that all was now over, that his end in some form was approaching, that around him there was nothing but impenetrable night—that before him lay some awful chasm into which he must fall.

"On! On!" a voice seemed to whisper in his ear.

He looked round and beheld the figure of Death. A white skeleton, mounted on the skeleton of a horse, rode close beside him. He could hear the rattle of their bones.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Knight of the Cross in horror. "It is you!"

"It is! On! On!"

At the same moment he perceived that he had another companion who rode along by his other side. The creature had a human body, but the dark hairy face and head of a beast.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Siegfried.

Instead of answering, the creature only showed its teeth and began growling in a hollow voice. Siegfried shut his eyes.

"It is time! It is time!" said a voice close to his ear. "Hasten! On! On!"

"I go!" he said. But the answer seemed to him to be uttered by someone not himself.

Impelled as if by some irresistible force, he dismounted and removed the high saddle from his horse. His companions dismounted also, and led him from the highway to the border of the forest. Here the black vampire bent

down a branch for him, and helped him to tie the bridle-strap to it.

"Hasten! Hasten!" whispered Death.

"Hasten!" repeated strange voices from the tree tops.

Siegfried, as if plunged in sleep, made a noose and, mounting upon the saddle which he had already placed beneath the tree, put the noose about his neck.

"Push away the saddle! . . . Now! Ah!"

Thrust aside by his feet, the saddle rolled off a few paces, and the body of the unhappy Knight of the Cross dangled heavily in the air. For a moment he heard a hoarse, stifled roar; the hideous vampire rushed upon him, swayed him to and fro, and began tearing his breast in order to gnaw out his heart. Then his fading eyesight saw the figure of Death transform itself into a whitish cloud which slowly approached him, encircling him, enveloping him, and at last covering everything in its terrible impenetrable veil.

The storm burst forth with fearful fury. The thunder seemed to rock the earth to its foundations. The whole forest bent beneath the whirlwind, and its recesses resounded with the creaking of tree-trunks and the crash of breaking branches. Sheets of rain, driven before the wind, veiled the presence of the forest. But at intervals, by the short blood-red flashes of the lightning, Siegfried's corpse could be seen swaying wildly over the highway.

On the following day a somewhat numerous retinue was proceeding along the same road. At the head rode Jagienka, Anulka, and the Bohemian, and they were followed by waggons surrounded by four well-armed grooms. The storm had been succeeded by a beautiful day—fresh, calm, and so bright that where there was no shadow the travellers' eyes were dazzled by the excessive light. Not a leaf stirred on the trees, and from every leaf great rain-drops hung, assuming all the hues of the rainbow in the sunlight. After the rain the whole country smiled in the morning brightness. It was such a morning as fills the heart with joy, and the drivers and servants sang in a low voice as they went along, and wondered at the silence of those who rode in front.

But these were silent because of the heavy affliction which oppressed Jagienka's soul. She felt that all she had hitherto lived for was lost beyond recall, that all her

hopes were scattered like morning mists driven across the fields, and that she must now renounce everything, forget everything, and begin her life anew. A great longing for the past filled her heart and rose in a stream of tears to her eyes. Yet she would not weep, for in addition to her grief she felt also the burden of shame. She knew that she had not left home merely to deprive Cztan and Wilk of any reason for attacking Zgorzelice. Macko, too, knew it, and Zbyszko also would surely learn it. At the thought her cheeks burned and her heart overflowed with bitterness.

The current of her sadness was interrupted by the appearance of a man who came hastily towards them. Hlawa urged his horse forward to meet him, and saw by his crossbow, his badger pouch, and the nut-cracker's feathers on his cap, that he was a forest guard.

"Stand! Who are you?" he shouted nevertheless, in order to make sure.

As the guard advanced his face was seen to be perturbed, as if he had some extraordinary news to tell.

"In front of you there is a man's body hanging over the highway!" he exclaimed.

Hlawa was alarmed by these words, for he imagined that the deed must be that of some band of robbers.

"Is it far from here?" he asked.

"Only a bow-shot distant; just along the highway."

"Go and see what it is," said Jagienka.

Hlawa rode ahead cautiously. Presently he came hastily back.

"It is Siegfried who hangs there!" he exclaimed, stopping his horse before Jagienka.

"In heaven's name! Siegfried! The Knight of the Cross?"

"The Knight! He has hanged himself with his bridle!"

"With his own hand?"

"Evidently, for his saddle is by his side. Robbers would simply have killed him and taken his saddle away, for it is valuable."

Both Jagienka and Anulka were somewhat frightened at the thought of passing the Knight's body. Anulka implored Hlawa to take them round through the forest. After meditating for a time, however, Jagienka said:

"Yet it is not fitting that a dead man should be left unburied."

"It is not," answered Hlawka, "but he is a Knight of the Cross, a wretch and a tormentor. Let the ravens and the wolves see to him!"

"Do not talk foolishly! It is for God to judge his evil deeds, and for us to do our duty. No evil can come to us if we obey the holy commandment."

"Well, be it as you wish," answered Hlawka. And he at once gave orders for Siegfried's burial.

This was hastily accomplished, and then, in accordance with custom, the grave was covered over with stones, lest the suicide's spirit should rise at night and disturb travellers. Having cut a cross on a neighbouring pine tree—not for Siegfried's sake, but to prevent evil spirits from gathering on the spot—Hlawka returned to the retinue.

For a long time they rode on in silence, meditating about the terrible monk-knight, and the punishment that had overtaken him.

"God's justice is unfailing," said Jagienka at length. "It is not right to say even 'Requiescat in pace,' for there is no mercy for him."

"And yet you have already proved your merciful soul by allowing him to be buried," answered the Bohemian. "People say," he went on hesitatingly, "that the rope used by a suicide brings one luck in all one's dealings—at least, sorcerers and witches say so. But I did not take Siegfried's bridle, for I hope for happiness for you, not from sorcery, but with the help of the Lord Jesus alone."

For a time Jagienka made no answer. Then she sighed and said, as if speaking to herself:

"My happiness lies not in the future, but in the past!"

CHAPTER LXII.

It was ten days after Jagienka's departure that Zbyszko reached the borders of Spychow. Danusia, however, seemed so near to death that he had lost all hope of bringing her alive to her father. Exhausted by captivity, torture, and terror, her body had no longer sufficient force to contend against the ravages of her malady. Until nearly the end of the journey the fever did not leave her. This was perhaps well, for Zbyszko was able to carry her unconscious through all the dangers and hardships of the wilderness. These troubles were over when they reached the settlements of peasants and the houses of noblemen in a "pious" country. When the people learned that they carried a Polish child rescued from the Knights of the Cross—a daughter of the glorious Jurand, of whom minstrels sang in castle, manor-hall, and hut—they vied with each other in offering their services and help.

Zbyszko was no longer compelled to carry Danusia in a litter borne between two horses, for strong youths bore her from one village to another on a litter as tenderly and carefully as if they had been in charge of a relic. Women surrounded her and tended her with devoted care. Men, listening to the story of her wrongs, gnashed their teeth, while some even donned their armour, or seized sword, axe, or spear, and went on with Zbyszko to avenge her.

But Zbyszko had now no thought of vengeance. He thought only of Danusia. He lived between alternating fits of hope and despair. He was no longer able to deceive himself as to the danger of her state. Many a time during the journey, as they rode through the pathless tracts of the forest, he had imagined that the figure of Death was following them step by step, awaiting only a convenient moment to fall upon Danusia and wrest from her the remnant of her strength. Towards the end of the journey it was even worse, for he felt that Death was no longer

behind the cavalcade but in its midst, although invisible, and near enough for them to feel her icy breath. And he knew that against such a foe neither courage, nor strength of hand, nor keenness of weapon could be of any avail, and that he must yield to her, helplessly, without resistance, the being whom he cherished most on earth. At the thought that he had loved her, and rescued her only to lay her in the earth and never see her more, his anguish became irresistible as the tempest, unfathomable as the sea.

When still a few hours distant from Spychow a bright ray of hope entered his heart. Danusia's cheeks became less flushed and her look less troubled, while her breathing was not so loud and quick as before. Zbyszko at once ordered a halt in order that she might rest for a time. They were still far from any dwelling, on a narrow path running between a meadow and a fallow field. A pear tree standing close by afforded shelter from the sun, and beneath this they stopped. The grooms dismounted and unbitted their horses that they might feed the easier on the grass. The two women who had been hired to attend upon Danusia, and the youths who had been carrying the litter, lay down on the grass and fell asleep, tired out with the journey and the heat. Zbyszko alone sat at the foot of the tree and watched Danusia.

In the calm of the afternoon she lay with closed eyelids. Yet it seemed to Zbyszko that she was not asleep. At the farther end of the meadow a peasant was mowing hay. When he paused and began whetting his scythe with the stone, Danusia trembled a little at the sound and opened her eyes for a moment. Her breast heaved as if she were taking a deeper breath, and with her lips she whispered faintly:

"The flowers smell so sweet. . . ."

These were the first words she had spoken since the beginning of the journey, and they were not the outcome of delirium. A breath of wind indeed came from the meadow, heated by the sun, carrying with it the scent of hay and honey and many fragrant herbs. At the thought that Danusia's senses were returning to her, Zbyszko's heart throbbed with joy. In his first rapture he was about to throw himself at her feet, but, fearing that he might startle her, he restrained himself, and, stooping over her, he exclaimed in a low voice:

"Danusia! Danusia!"

She again opened her eyes and gazed at him for a time. A smile lightened her face, and with greater intelligence than she had shown when lying in the pitch-burner's hut she pronounced his name:

"Zbyszko! . . ."

She tried to stretch out her arms to him, but could not because of her great weakness. He, however, clasped her in his arms, his heart full to overflowing.

"You are awake!" he cried. "Thank God! Thank God!"

He held his breath, and for a time they looked upon one another in silence. The stillness of the field was troubled only by the fragrant breeze from the meadow as it murmured among the pear tree's leaves, by the whirring of the grasshoppers, and the faint, far-off song of the mower. Danusia continued to smile—like a child that sees an angel in its dreams—but gradually a look of astonishment appeared in her eyes.

"Where am I?" she asked.

From his lips burst forth a torrent of joyful answers.

"You are by my side! We are close to Spychow—on our way to your father. Your distress is now over. Danusia, O Danusia! I have sought after and rescued you. You are no longer in the hands of the Germans. Do not be afraid! We shall be in Spychow instantly. You have been sick, but the Lord Jesus has had mercy on you. We have had much grief and weeping, Danusia, but now all is well. Nothing but happiness awaits you. Ah, how long I have wandered in search of you! Ah, mighty God!" And he breathed deeply, as if throwing the rest of his burden of grief from off his breast.

Danusia lay calm, as if recollecting or meditating about something.

"Then you did not forget me?" she asked. And two tears rose to her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"How could I forget you!" exclaimed Zbyszko passionately, for now that he had recovered her she was dearer to him than the whole world.

Again there was silence; only in the distance the peasant, who had ceased singing, again whetted his scythe repeatedly with the stone. Again Danusia's lips began to move, but now she whispered so low that Zbyszko bent over her and asked:

"What is it you say, my love?"

"The flowers smell so sweet, . . ." she repeated.

"Because we are close to a meadow," he answered.

"But we will set out at once—to your father, who has been rescued also. And you shall be mine till death! Do you hear me? Do you understand?"

He was suddenly seized with alarm, for he saw that she had grown paler and that small beads of perspiration had begun to settle upon her face.

"What ails you, Danusia?" he asked in dread.

"It is so dark!" she whispered.

"Dark! The sun is shining! Does it seem dark to you?" he asked in a choking voice.

She moved her lips, but she could no longer even whisper. He could only guess that she was uttering his name. Her wasted hand began to quiver and tremble as it lay on the rug with which she was covered. Zbyszko watched it for a time. It was no longer possible for him to deceive himself. She was dying!

In his awe and despair he began to supplicate her, as if entreaty could have availed anything.

"Danusia!" he cried. "O merciful Jesus! . . . Wait until we reach Spychow! Wait! Wait! . . . O Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!"

During his supplications the women awoke, and the grooms, who had been at a little distance on the meadow with the horses, came running back. They understood at a glance what was taking place; they therefore knelt down and began loudly to recite the litany.

The breath of wind was lulled to rest, the leaves of the pear tree ceased to murmur, and only the words of the prayer disturbed the great stillness of the field.

Just before the end of the litany Danusia opened her eyes as if to look once more on Zbyszko and the sunny world. Then she fell asleep for ever.

The women closed her eyes, and then, followed by the grooms, went to gather flowers in the meadow. They seemed like field spirits in the sunlight as they went to and fro among the luxuriant herbs, stooping every moment to pick the flowers, their faces wet with weeping, and pity and grief within their hearts. In the shadow, by the litter, knelt Zbyszko, his head resting on Danusia's knees, silent and motionless, as if he too were dead. The women and the grooms walked slowly about—now

nearer, now farther off—plucking yellow marigolds and harebells, pinks, and honey-scented meadow-sweet. In a hollow where the moisture had gathered they found field lilies, and on a balk close to the fallow land they found heather. When all had gathered an armful, they approached the litter. Surrounding it, and chanting a mournful chorus, they began to adorn it with their flowers. Danusia's face alone was left uncovered by the blossoms; like that of an angel, it lay amid the harebells and the lilies, pale, still, serene—calmed by the impress of the eternal sleep.

At length, when their grief had eased itself in tears, they lifted the litter and set out towards the pine forests which marked the confines of Jurand's estates. The grooms led the horses behind the retinue. Zbyszko himself supported the head of the litter, and the women, bearing the flowers and herbs that remained, walked in front singing pious songs. Slowly the procession made its way between the green meadow and the grey, level fallow ground. Not a cloud obscured the azure of the sky. The whole earth was bathed in golden sunshine.

PART IX.

CHAPTER LXIII.

At length the retinue bearing Danusia's body reached the pine forests of Spychow, the confines of which were guarded day and night by Jurand's armed grooms. One of these ran on with the news to old Tolima and Father Kaleb, while the others conducted the cavalcade by a winding, hollow road, which widened as it neared the spot where the forest ended and the broad, dank, rugged wastes and the great, quaggy swamps, swarming with marsh-fowl, began. Beyond these, on a dry eminence, stood the castle of Spychow. They soon perceived that their mournful news had already reached Spychow, for when they emerged from the forest shadows to traverse the sunlit meadow the sound of the chapel bells fell upon their ears. Presently they saw in the distance a great crowd of men and women coming to meet them. When the people had approached to within a few bow-shots of them they saw that Jurand himself walked at their head, supported by Tolima, and groping his way with the aid of a staff. They easily recognised him by his enormous stature, his eyeless sockets, and the white hair that fell over his shoulders. By his side walked Father Kaleb wearing a white surplice and bearing a crucifix. Behind him came armed men carrying a banner with Jurand's arms, and these were followed by bare-headed maidens and married women with kerchiefs on their heads. A sort of waggon for the reception of the bier brought up the rear.

On seeing Jurand, Zbyszko ordered them to place the litter on the ground. Then, approaching the old knight, he cried out in tones marked with boundless grief and despair:

"I sought for her until I found and rescued her! But she has gone home to God instead of to Spychow!" And, completely crushed with anguish, he fell on Jurand's breast and clasped his neck, moaning: "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!"

At this sight the hearts of the armed men were stirred, and they began striking their spears against their shields, not knowing how else to express their sorrow and their thirst for vengeance. The women wailed and wept. Raising their aprons to their eyes, or covering their heads with them, they cried aloud: "Ah! Woe, woe! You are happy, but we lament! Woe, woe! Death has cut you down and carried you away! Ah! Woe!" Some, throwing their heads backwards and closing their eyes, cried: "Were you not happy here with us, little flower? Was it not well with you? Your father is left in distress, and you walk in God's chambers! Ah! Woe!" Others reproached the dead that she did not pity the tears and bereavement of her husband and her father. Their wailing and lamentations rose almost like a song, for the people were unable otherwise to express their grief.

But Jurand, releasing himself from Zbyszko's arms, stretched forth his staff to signify that he wished to go to Danusia. Tolima and Zbyszko grasped his arms and led him to the litter. There the old knight knelt down by the dead girl's side, passed his hand downwards from her forehead to her arms folded across her breast, and bowed his head repeatedly as if to say he knew that it was Danusia and no one else. He then embraced her with one arm and lifted the other, deprived of its hand, to Heaven. All understood his dumb complaint to God, more eloquent than any words of grief. Zbyszko, whose face had again become composed after his momentary outburst of anguish, knelt at the other side of the litter, silent and motionless as a statue. All around were now still, so that one could hear the chirp of the grasshoppers and even the buzz of the flies. At length Father Kaleb sprinkled Danusia, Zbyszko, and Jurand with holy water and began the "Requiem æternam." When it was finished he prayed for a long time in a loud voice, and when he asked Heaven that the torments of the innocent child might be as the last drop that overflows the cup of wickedness, and that the day of judgment, wrath and retribution might speedily come,

then it seemed to the people that they were listening to a prophetic voice.

When they set out for Spychow they did not lay Danusia on the cart that had been brought. They carried her at the head of the cavalcade on the litter adorned with flowers. The bells did not cease their ringing but seemed to invite them to approach, and they made their way across the broad meadow-land, beneath the fiery glow of the evening sky, as if they felt that the dead girl were leading them on towards the divine light and life. As they reached the castle the herds were returning from the fields. The chapel in which the body was laid shone with tapers and torches. By Father Kaleb's order seven maids said the litany over Danusia until daybreak. Until then Zbyszko did not leave her. At matins he placed her with his own hands in her coffin, which had been made during the night from the trunk of an oak, the lid having a sheet of golden amber inserted at the head.

Jurand was not present, for with him strange things were happening. As soon as he reached home he lost all power of moving his legs, and when they laid him on his bed they found that all his limbs were stricken in like fashion. His consciousness too had fled, and he seemed to know neither where he was nor what had happened to him. It was in vain that Father Kaleb tried to speak with him and to discover what ailed him. Jurand neither heard nor understood; but sometimes, as he lay on his back, he raised his empty eyelids and smiled with a bright and happy face, and sometimes he moved his lips as if he were speaking with some one. Both Tolima and the priest believed it was with his daughter that he spoke, that it was to her that he smiled. They thought, too, that he was drawing near his last breath, and that, with his spiritual eyes, he already beheld the joys of eternal happiness. In this, however, they were mistaken, for he lay thus, deaf and insensible to everything, for several weeks; so that Zbyszko, when he at length set out with Macko's ransom, left Jurand still alive.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AFTER the funeral of Danusia, Zbyszko sank into a sort of stupor. During the first few days, however, he was still in some measure himself; he walked about speaking of his dead wife, and sometimes he went to see Jurand and sat by his side. He also told Father Kaleb of Macko's captivity, and both agreed that Tolima should be sent to Prussia and Marienburg to discover his whereabouts and ransom him, paying at the same time the same sum for Zbyszko, as had been agreed upon with Arnold von Baden and his brother. In the vaults of Spychow there was no lack of silver. It had been earned by Jurand's husbandry, or taken by him as booty in war. Father Kaleb, therefore, believed that when the Knights of the Cross had received the money they would readily set the old knight at liberty, and would not exact the appearance in person of his nephew.

"Go to Plock," said the priest to Tolima as he set out, "and obtain the Prince's safe-conduct. Otherwise any of the komthurs may rob and imprison you."

"I know them well," answered the old man; "they are capable of robbing even those who have safe-conducts."

When he had gone Kaleb began to regret that he had not sent Zbyszko himself. The young knight's heart seemed to grow heavier day by day. The terrible state of tension in which he had been living before Danusia's death had suddenly ceased, and there remained only the knowledge that all his efforts had been in vain, that while the hardships he had endured were ended, a part of his life had also gone, that hope, and happiness and love had perished, and that for him nothing was left. While all the world lived in the hope of to-morrow, Zbyszko was indifferent to everything even in the present, and, as for the future, he felt as Jagienka felt when, setting out from Spychow, she said: "My happiness lies not in the future, but in the past!" He seemed to be

insensible to everything about him, and to think only of the great affliction that had befallen him. All the powers of his mind and body were relaxed; his former gaiety and vigour disappeared. In his looks and bearing there was now the sluggishness of an old man. For whole days and nights he would sit in the vault by Danusia's coffin; sometimes, at noontide, he would sit at the entrance warming himself in the sunlight. Sometimes he was so lost to all recollection that he paid no heed to any questions. Then Kaleb, who loved him much, began to fear that his pain would consume him as rust consumes iron, and that, unless he could be stirred by some adventure, as the forest is stirred by the tempest, his old energy would never return.

Although no adventure occurred, a few weeks later the Knight de Lorche suddenly arrived. His appearance roused Zbyszko, for it recalled to his mind the expedition to Samogitia and Danusia's rescue. On learning Zbyszko's misfortune, de Lorche at once went to pray with him in the vault, and comforted him by speaking constantly of Danusia. Being something of a minstrel, he composed a song about her, and at night, sitting by the lattice window of the tomb, he sang it so sadly and feelingly to the accompaniment of his lute that Zbyszko, although he could not understand the words, was so moved by the music that he wept until daybreak.

Overpowered with weeping, grief and weariness, he fell into a long deep sleep, and when he awoke it was apparent that the flow of tears had lightened his affliction, for his looks were less mournful than before. He also took pleasure in the presence of de Lorche, and, after thanking him for his visit, inquired how he had learnt of his misfortune. With the help of Father Kaleb, de Lorche told him that he had learnt of Danusia's death in Lubowa from Tolima, whom he saw in fetters at the commandery, but that he was then riding to Spychow purposely, to give himself up as Zbyszko's prisoner.

The news of Tolima's capture made a deep impression on Zbyszko and the priest. They knew that the ransom was lost, for nothing in the world was more difficult than to make the Knights of the Cross disgorge money which they had once seized. It would be necessary, they saw, to send fresh ransom.

"So much the worse!" exclaimed Zbyszko. "My poor uncle is still among them and must think I have forgotten him! But now I must go to him with all haste. Have you heard of it?" he continued, addressing de Lorche. "Do you know that he is in the hands of the Knights?"

"I know, for I saw him in Marienburg; it was that that determined me to come here."

"We have made a mistake," said Father Kaleb sadly, "but just then every one had lost his wits. I thought Tolima was wiser! Why did he not go to Plock? Why did he go among those robbers without a safe-conduct?"

"What do they care for safe-conducts!" exclaimed de Lorche, shrugging his shoulders. "Does not the Prince of Plock himself, as well as your own prince, suffer many injuries at their hands? Every komthur and bailiff does as he likes, and they outvie each other in rapacity."

"So much the more should Tolima have gone to Plock!"

"He would have done so, but they seized him on his way. They threatened to kill him unless he would say that he was bringing money to Lubowa for the Komthur. Thus he was saved, but the Komthur will now produce witnesses to prove that Tolima himself told them so."

"And my uncle Macko, how does he fare?" asked Zbyszko. "Do not they seek his life?"

"He is well," answered de Lorche. "There is great indignation against Prince Witold and those who help the Samogitians, and they would assuredly slay the old knight did they not care for the ransom. The brothers von Baden protect him for the same reason. Moreover, the Chapter is concerned about my life, for were it to be sacrificed they would have to face the fury of the knights of Flanders, Geldern and Burgundy. As you know, I am a relative of the Count of Geldern."

"But why should they be anxious about your head?" asked Zbyszko in astonishment.

"Because I am your prisoner. In Marienburg I said to them that if they took the life of the old Knight of Bogdaniec you would take mine."

"I will not—so help me, Heaven!"

"I know you will not, but still they fear it, and therefore Macko will be safe among them. They told me that you also were in captivity and that, as the von Badens released you only on your word of honour, I

was not bound to appear before you. But I answered that you were free when you took me. Well, here I am in your hands! And while I am in your hands they will do no injury either to you or Macko. Pay your ransom to the von Badens, and then demand for me twice or thrice as much. They must pay it. I say this not because I think I am worth more than you, but in order to punish their greed, which I despise. Formerly I had a different opinion of them, but now they and their hospitality are loathsome to me. I will go to the Holy Land in search of adventures, for I will not serve with them any more."

"Why not remain with us, Pan?" said Father Kaleb. "Indeed I think it will come to that, for I do not believe they will give any ransom for you."

"Then I will do so myself," answered de Lorche. "I have a considerable retinue with me, and well laden waggons; what is on them will suffice."

"Upon my honour," said Zbyszko who, unlike his uncle, cared little for wealth, "it will not be as you say! To me you have been as a friend and brother, and from you I will take no ransom!"

They embraced each other, feeling that they were now united by fresh ties.

"The Germans must know nothing of this," said de Lorche with a smile, "otherwise they would do some hurt to Macko. They must pay, I say, for they will fear lest I divulge their eagerness to invite foreign knights to serve with them, although when their guests are made captive they are sometimes forgotten. But now the Order is anxious to see as many guests as possible, for they fear Witold, and the Poles, and their King still more."

"Then let it be thus," said Zbyszko. "You will remain here or anywhere you will in Mazovia; I will go to Marienburg for my uncle, and there I will feign terrible rancour against you."

"By Saint George! Do so!" answered de Lorche. "But listen. They say in Marienburg that the Polish King is to come to Plock to meet the Grand Master there or somewhere on the frontier. The Knights of the Cross are much bent on this, for they wish to discover whether the King will help Witold if that prince should openly declare war on behalf of the Samogitians. They are cunning as serpents, but in Witold they have their

master. The Order fears him, for it is never known what he means or what he will do. 'He gave us Samogitia,' they say in the Chapter, 'but by means of it he is ever as a sword swaying over our heads. He need but say one word and a rebellion is ripe!' And indeed it is so. Some day I will go to his court, and perhaps I shall have occasion to enter the lists. I have heard that there one may sometimes see women of angelic beauty."

"You were speaking, Pan, of the Polish King coming to Plock?" interrupted the priest.

"Yes. Let Zbyszko join the King's court there. The Grand Master desires to conciliate the King and will refuse him nothing. When occasion demands, none can be humbler than the Knights of the Cross. Therefore let Zbyszko join the royal suite and loudly claim his rights. They will listen to him in a different fashion when in the presence of the King and the knights of Krakow, who are famous throughout the world and whose decrees are known among the knights of all lands."

"Excellent counsel, by the Saviour's cross!" exclaimed Father Kaleb.

"Nor will there be any lack of opportunity," continued de Lorche. "There will be many great banquets and tournaments; it is even said that John of Aragon, the greatest knight in all Christendom, will be there. They say he has sent a challenge to young Zawisza, that it may no longer be said at foreign courts that he has an equal anywhere in the world."

The conversation roused Zbyszko from his stupor. He had heard of John of Aragon, before the very sight of whose armour the Moors had fled in terror, and who was generally acknowledged to be the first knight in all Christendom. At the mention of him the spirit of combat and chivalry once more awoke in Zbyszko.

"Has he indeed challenged Zawisza the Black?" he asked with interest.

"They say he sent his gauntlet a year ago, and Zawisza at once sent his own gauntlet back."

"Then John of Aragon will assuredly come?"

"I do not say assuredly, but it is rumoured so. The Knights of the Cross sent him an invitation long since."

"God grant that we be there to see!"

"God grant it!" said de Lorche. "And even should

Zawisza be overpowered, which may well happen, yet it will be a great glory for him to have been challenged by such a knight as John of Aragon—yes, a great glory for all your nation.”

“We shall see,” said Zbyszko. “I only say: God grant that I may see it!”

“And I also!” responded de Lorche.

This wish, however, was not to be fulfilled, for, according to the old chronicles, the combat between Zawisza and the renowned John of Aragon was not fought for more than ten years later, at Perpignan. There, in the presence of the Emperor Sigismund, Pope Benedict XIII., the King of Aragon, and many princes and cardinals, Zawisza Czarny of Garbow unhorsed his adversary at the first thrust of the lance, thus gaining a glorious victory over him.

Meanwhile, however, both Zbyszko and de Lorche were exceedingly glad at heart, for they knew that, even if John of Aragon were unable to appear, they would nevertheless witness many splendid deeds of chivalry, for in Poland there was no lack of warriors who were not greatly inferior to Zawisza, while among the guests of the Knights of the Cross the most skilled swordsmen were always to be found—French, English, Burgundian, and Italian—ready to enter the lists against any one.

“Listen,” said Zbyszko presently. “I yearn for my uncle, and would ransom him without delay. I will therefore set out for Plock before daybreak to-morrow. But why should you remain here? You are my prisoner; therefore come with me, and you shall see the King and his court.”

“I had, indeed, a mind to solicit that favour,” answered de Lorche, “for I have long desired to see your knights, and, moreover, I have heard that the ladies of the King’s court resemble angels rather than earthly beings.”

“It was only just now that you said the same of the ladies of Witold’s court!” exclaimed Zbyszko.

CHAPTER LXV.

ZBYSZKO inwardly reproached himself that in his grief he had forgotten his uncle, and as he was in the habit of executing his resolutions promptly he set out for Plock before daybreak next morning, accompanied by his friend de Lorche. Although the roads near the frontier were haunted by numerous bands of robbers who were protected and maintained by the Knights of the Cross, the two young knights, being accompanied by a retinue consisting of some ten armed grooms on foot and on horseback in addition to the waggoners, reached Plock unmolested and without adventure. There, on their arrival, they met with a pleasant surprise, for in the inn they encountered Tolima, who had arrived on the previous day. The Starosta of Lubowa, learning that Tolima had succeeded in concealing a part of the ransom before he was attacked near Brodnica, had sent him back thither in order that the Komthur should compel him to disclose the place where the money was concealed. Afraid that the story of the stolen ransom should get abroad, and that instead of dividing the money between them they should be made to send the greater part of it to Marienburg or even restore the whole of it to the brothers von Baden, the Komthurs of Lubowa and Brodnica had deemed it wise not to excite attention by furnishing a numerous guard for the prisoner.

"I was conducted by but two men," said Tolima, "one a clerk and the other a trusty soldier, who had to row with me on the Drweca. They were afraid lest some one should see us, for there the frontier is close. So we went at dusk. They gave me one of the oaken oars and—well, God was merciful, for here I am in Plock!"

"Ah! So they did not return!" exclaimed Zbyszko.

"The Drweca flows into the Vistula," said the old man,

a smile brightening his rough face. "How then could they return up-stream? The Knights of the Cross may find them at Thorn. As for the money, part of it was taken from me by the Komthur of Lubowa, but that which I was able to conceal I recovered, and have delivered it to the keeping of your groom who is now at the castle, for it is safer there than with me at the inn."

"My groom here in Plock!" exclaimed Zbyszko in surprise. "What is he doing here?"

"After bringing Siegfried to Spychow, he departed with the lady who was then there and who is now one of the maids of the Princess of Plock. So he told me yesterday."

But Zbyszko's mind was still too full of grief to think about anything that had happened at Spychow. He only remembered that Hlawa had been sent on ahead with Siegfried, the thought of whom made his heart swell with pain and desire for vengeance.

"Ah, yes!" said he. "Where is that hangman? What has become of him?"

"Did not Father Kaleb tell you? Siegfried hanged himself on a tree, and you, Pan, must have passed close to his grave."

"Your groom told me," said Tolima after a pause, "that he was about to come to you, and that he would have done so long ago had he not been obliged to guard his Panienska, who was sick after her journey from Spychow."

"What Panienska?" asked Zbyszko again, as if trying to shake off the nightmare of his recollections.

"Your sister or cousin," answered the old man, "who came to Spychow dressed as a lad along with the Knight Macko. On the way they met our Pan groping blindly about. Had she not been there neither Macko nor the groom would have recognised him. The old Pan loved her greatly, and she ministered to him as if she were his own daughter. Except Father Kaleb she was the only person who could understand him."

The young knight opened his eyes in amazement.

"Father Kaleb told me nothing of any Panienska," said he, "and I have neither cousin nor sister! How was she called, this Panienska?"

"They called her Jagienka."

It was to Zbyszko as if he were in a dream. The idea of Jagienka coming to Spychow from distant Zgorzelice was beyond his comprehension. For what reason had she done so? It was, indeed, no secret to him that the maid had looked upon him kindly and with sympathy in Zgorzelice; but he had confessed to her since that he was married, and therefore he could not by any means imagine that Macko had taken her with him to Spychow in order to marry her to him. Then neither Macko nor Hlawa had ever mentioned the girl to him. All this seemed to him exceedingly strange and quite incomprehensible. He therefore began pestering Tolima with further questions, like a man who is unable to believe his own ears and asks that some incredible piece of news shall be repeated to him. Tolima, being unable to tell more than he had already done, offered instead to go to the castle in search of Hlawa.

Before sunset the Bohemian arrived. He greeted his young lord with mingled joy and sorrow, for he had learnt all that had lately happened. Zbyszko, too, was sincerely glad to see him, for he knew that Hlawa's was a true and loving heart, such as a man is glad to have when in sorrow. So the master shared his grief with the servant as if he had been his brother. When they had spoken of Danusia's death, and de Lorche, at Zbyszko's desire, had sung the song he had composed in memory of her, they began to discuss the affairs that awaited them in Plock.

"Tolima has told me," said Zbyszko to the Bohemian, "that you were about to come to me, but that you were delayed by the illness of Jagienka, Zych's daughter. I heard that my uncle Macko had brought her into this country and that she had also been in Spychow. At this I wondered greatly. Tell me for what reason Macko took her with him from Zgorzelice."

"There were many reasons. Your uncle feared that if she were left without protection the Knights Wilk and Czta might attack Zgorzelice, whereby some injury might happen to the younger children also. Then the abbot died and made her his heiress, under the tutelage of the Bishop of Plock. For this reason Macko has brought the Panienska to Plock."

"But he also took her to Spychow?"

"He did, for there was no one with whom he could leave her during the absence of the Bishop and of the Prince and Princess. And it was fortunate that he did so, for without her we should have passed Jurand by like some unknown beggar. It was only because she began pitying him that we recognised who he really was. God ordered it all by means of her charitable heart!" And he went on to tell how Jurand afterwards was unable to be without her, how he loved her and blessed her, and Zbyszko, although he had already heard it all from Tolima, listened to the story with emotion, feeling grateful in his heart to Jagienka.

"God grant her health!" he said at length. "I wonder only that you did not speak of her to me before."

Hlawa was somewhat confused, and in order to consider his reply asked:

"When, Pan?"

"When we were with Skirwoillo—in Samogitia."

"Did we not speak of her? Forsooth, it seems to me we did, but then you had other matters to think of."

"You told me Jurand had returned, but said nothing about Jagienka."

"Perhaps you have forgotten—Heaven knows! Perhaps Macko thought that I had told you, and I thought that he had done so. In any event what matters it now? Now I have something else to tell you; it is lucky that the Panienka is here, for she may be of service to your uncle."

"What can she do?"

"Let her but say a word to the Princess, who loves her greatly! The Knights of the Cross, too, refuse the Princess nothing, for she is the King's sister and a great friend of the Order. As you may have heard, Prince Skirgiell, the King's brother, has risen against Prince Witold and fled to the Knights of the Cross, who desire to help him and place him on Witold's throne. The King loves the Princess much and, they say, listens to her willingly; therefore the Knights of the Cross hope she may incline the King to favour Skirgiell and oppose Witold. They know well, the hounds, that if they once get rid of Witold they will remain unmolested. The Teuton envoys therefore prostrate themselves at the Princess's feet from morning till night, and vie with each other to anticipate her wishes."

"Jagienka will surely intercede in my uncle's behalf, for she loves him very much," said Zbyszko.

"Surely! But come, Pan, to the castle, and tell her what and how she must speak."

After calling the servants and dressing themselves fitly for the evening banquet at the castle, Hlawa told Zbyszko more concerning the affairs of the King's and the Prince's Courts.

"The Knights of the Cross," said he, "are constantly plotting against Prince Witold; they have already incited both the Prince and the Princess against him, and it is said that even Prince Janusz is wroth with him because of Wizna . . ."

"Then Prince Janusz and the Princess Anna are here also?" asked Zbyszko. "I shall have plenty of friends, for this is not the first time I have been in Plock."

"Yes, indeed, they are both here," answered Hlawa, "and they have not a few complaints against the Knights of the Cross which they wish to prefer against the Grand Master in the King's presence."

"And the King? On what side is he? Is he not angry with the Knights; does he not threaten them with the sword?"

"The King does not love them, and they say he has long threatened them with war. As for Witold, the King prefers him to his own brother Skirgiell, who is frivolous and drunken. It is said, therefore, that he will neither declare against Witold nor promise the Knights of the Cross not to help him. It must be so, for during the past few days the Princess Alexandra has been courting the King a great deal and has seemed somewhat low-spirited."

"Is Zawisza of Garbow here?" asked Zbyszko.

"He is not, but there is sufficient to admire in those knights who are present, and, if it should come to it, they will make splinters and bullens fly from off the Germans!"

On this occasion the banquet was to take place, not at the Prince's but at the spacious house of Andrew of Jasieniec, situated within the castle walls close to the great tower. As the night was excessively warm the tables were laid out in the yard, where service-trees and yews grew at intervals between the stone slabs. They were lighted by the bright yellow glare of burning tar-

barrels, but still brighter shone the moon overhead, glittering in the cloudless sky amid the swarms of stars like the silvery shield of a knight.

Zbyszko knew many of the knights who were present, especially among those from the court of Prince Janusz; but the sight of Powala of Taczew was especially welcome to him, for he well remembered the friendship which the famous knight of Krakow had shown him. Powala at once recognised him and, making his way through the Mazovian knights, he approached him and shook him by the hand.

"I recognised you, young man," he said. "How fares it with you, and what brings you here? By Heaven! I see you already wear the girdle and spurs! Others have to wait for them until they are grey, but you, it seems, are a worthy servant of Saint George."

"God bless you, noble Pan!" answered Zbyszko. "Had I unhorsed the greatest of Germans I should be less glad than I am to see you in good health."

"I also am glad. And your father, where is he?"

"Not my father, but my uncle. He is in the hands of the Knights of the Cross, and I am on my way to ransom him."

"And the maiden who threw her veil over you?"

To this Zbyszko did not reply but only raised his eyes, which were instantly dimmed with tears. Seeing this the Pan of Taczew said kindly:

"Let us sit on that bench beneath the service-tree, that you may tell me of your sorrows."

Sitting in the corner of the courtyard the young knight told him of Jurand's misfortunes, Danusia's abduction, his own search for her and her death after her rescue. Powala listened attentively, astonishment, horror, anger, and pity being alternately reflected in his face.

"I will tell it to the King!" he said when Zbyszko had finished. "He was about to intercede on behalf of little Jasko of Kretkow and demand that those who seized him shall be severely punished. They seized him because he is rich, and because they want ransom. For them it is nothing to raise their hands against a child."

Here he pondered a little, and then continued as if speaking to himself:

"They are an implacable race, worse than the Turks or Tartars. Although in their hearts they fear the

King and us also, yet they cannot restrain themselves from robbing and murder. They attack villages, slaying peasants, drowning fishermen, and carrying off children like wolves. How then would it be if they had no fear? Their Grand Master sends letters to other courts maligning our King, but in his presence he fawns upon him, for he knows our power better than the others. But the cup must overflow at last!"

He was silent for a time and then he laid his hand on Zbyszko's shoulder.

"I will tell it to the King," he repeated. "His wrath has long been boiling within him like water in a pot, and you may be sure that the authors of your misery will not escape a severe punishment."

"None of them are left alive, Pan," answered Zbyszko.

"Heaven bless you!" exclaimed Powala. "You do not forgive your wrongs, it seems! Lichtenstein alone you have not yet repaid, but I know you could not. He cannot appear in the lists without the Grand Master's permission, and the Master, having need of his astuteness, is continually sending him to different courts."

"But first I must ransom my uncle."

"I know. . . . Well, Lichtenstein is not here, nor will he be in Raciazek, for he has gone to the English King in search of archers. And as for your uncle, have no fear. If the King or the Princess only says a word, the Grand Master will not let them cheat you in the matter of the ransom."

"There is the less likelihood of that as I have an important prisoner, the Knight de Lorche, a mighty lord and one in high esteem with them. He would be glad to greet you and make your acquaintance, for no one admires famous knights more than he."

He beckoned to de Lorche who stood close by, burning to know such a renowned knight as Powala, and presented them to each other.

"There could only be one honour greater than that of shaking your hand, Pan," said the elegant Lorrainer with his most chivalrous bow, "namely, that of fighting against you either in battle or in the lists."

The mighty Knight of Taczew smiled, for he was as a mountain by the side of de Lorche, who, though tall, was slender.

"As for me," he said, "I am glad that we shall meet

only over foaming jugs, and—God grant it!—never as you say.”

“Still,” said de Lorche hesitatingly and somewhat timidly, “should you wish to maintain, noble Pan, that Panna Agnieszka of Dlugolas is not the fairest and most virtuous lady in the whole world, then I should have the great honour to contradict you, and . . .”

“Well,” interrupted Powala with a loud and merry laugh, “I did once vow myself to the Princess of Burgundy, but she was then ten years older than I. If, then, you should have a mind to maintain that my Princess is not older than your Panna Agnieszka, in that case we must at once mount our horses!”

For a few moments the younger knight looked in wonder at the Pan of Taczew. Then his face began to quiver, and at length he too burst out into a hearty laugh. Powala stooped and, encircling the Lorrainer’s thighs with his arms, lifted him from the ground and dandled him aloft as if he had been an infant.

“Pax! pax! as the Bishop Kropidlo says. I like you, knight,” said he, “but, by Heaven, we shall not fight over any ladies!”

After embracing him he placed him on the ground, and just at that moment the blare of trumpets at the courtyard gates announced the entrance of Prince Ziemowit of Plock with his wife.

Taking Zbyszko by the hand, Powala led him through the yard, now gay with the dresses of the courtiers and ladies. From a distance the young knight scanned all the faces to discover any that might be known to him. Presently he started with astonishment, for close behind the Princess he saw a form and face that he knew well, but so grave, so beautiful and so stately withal, that he thought his eyes must be deceived.

“Is it Jagienka,” he asked himself, “or is it one of the Prince’s daughters?”

But it was indeed Jagienka, the daughter of Zych of Zgorzelice, for, when their eyes met for a moment, she smiled towards him kindly and pityingly and, growing a little paler, she lowered her eyelids. As she stood in the ineffable brightness of her beauty, tall and wonderful, her dark hair encircled with a golden band, she seemed not the daughter of a prince merely, but of a king.

CHAPTER LXVI.

Zbyszko knelt at the feet of the Princess of Plock, and paid her his homage. She did not recognise him at first, for it was long since she had seen him. It was only when he told her his name that she remembered him.

"Indeed!" she said, "I had taken you for some one belonging to the King's court. Zbyszko of Bogdaniec! Of course! Your uncle, the old Knight of Bogdaniec, visited us, and I remember that I and the ladies of my court shed abundant tears when he told us of you. And have you found your lady? Where is she at present?"

"She is dead, your Highness."

"O Jesus! Do not tell me so, for I shall not be able to restrain my tears. There is only one consolation—that she is assuredly in Heaven, and you are still young. Mighty God! Every woman is a feeble creature. But in Heaven there is compensation for all, and there you will certainly find her again. And the old Knight of Bogdaniec is here with you?"

"No, he is in Teuton captivity, and I am on my way to ransom him."

"So he too has been unfortunate! And he seemed to be so shrewd a man, knowing all manner of usages and stratagems. But when you have ransomed him, do not fail to visit us on your way home. We shall be happy to entertain you both, for, I tell you sincerely, he has no lack of shrewdness, and you—of chivalry."

"We will do so, your Highness—the more surely, indeed, as I have come hither purposely to ask your Highness for a kind word on his behalf."

"Good! Come to me to-morrow before our departure for the hunt; then I shall have time. . . ."

Her further words were drowned by a blast of trumpets, announcing the entrance of the Mazovian

Prince and Princess Janusz. The Princess Anna Danuta saw the young knight at once and, paying no heed to the bows of the host, she approached him and, to the astonishment of the courtiers, wept while he knelt at her feet. She then led him aside that he might tell her of her beloved Danusia's death.

Those of the guests who did not know Zbyszko began to inquire about his misfortunes, among them being the Teutonic envoys, Friedrich von Wenden, Komthur of Thorn, and Johann von Schoenfeld, Komthur of Osterode. The latter, on hearing from one of the courtiers of Prince Janusz what had happened, said:

"The Grand Master himself suspected Danveld and von Loewe of meddling with black magic . . ." Then, perceiving immediately that such a thing must cast a slur upon the whole Order, such as had lately fallen on the Templars, he added hastily: "Thus, at least, said the gossips; but it is false, for we have no such men among us."

"Those to whom the baptism of Lithuania was an offence may likewise loathe the Cross!" said the Pan of Taczew.

"We wear the Cross upon our breasts!" replied von Schoenfeld proudly.

"We ought to bear it in our hearts!" retorted Powala.

The trumpets sounded anew and the King entered, accompanied by the Archbishop of Gnesen, the Bishop of Krakow, the Bishop of Plock, the castellan of Krakow and other high officers and courtiers, among whom were Zyndram of Maszkow and the young Duke Jamont, the King's favourite courtier. The King was but little altered since Zbyszko had last seen him. His cheeks were deeply flushed as before, and he wore the same long hair, which he was constantly throwing back behind his ears, while his eyes still wandered uneasily about. It seemed to Zbyszko, however, as if he had grown in gravity and majesty, as if he had now a sense of greater security on the throne which, on the Queen's death, he had thought of relinquishing, not knowing whether he would be able to retain it—as if he were now more conscious of his enormous power and might. The Mazovian Princes placed themselves on either side of the King, the German envoys bowed low before him, while the chief courtiers gathered round about. The

walls of the courtyard seemed to tremble with the shouting, the blasts of the trumpets and the rattle of the drums.

When at length silence ensued, the envoy of the Knights of the Cross, von Wenden, began to speak of the Order's affairs, but the King, perceiving his purpose, waved his hand impatiently and said in his thick, loud voice:

"You must be silent! We have come here to be merry, and would see meat and drink, and not your parchments!"

But he smiled graciously notwithstanding, not wishing that the Knights of the Cross should think that he had replied angrily.

"There will be time enough," he added, "to speak of these matters with the Grand Master at Raciazek." Then, turning to Prince Ziemowit, he said: "To-morrow we hunt in the forest, do we not?"

The question was at the same time an announcement that the King wished to speak of nothing but the chase, which he loved with his whole soul, and for the sake of which he had always been glad to come to Mazovia, for both Little and Great Poland were less rich in forests, while some regions were so densely populated that there were none at all.

All faces therefore brightened, for it was known that while the talk was of hunting the King was always both merry and generous. So Prince Ziemowit at once began to tell where they proposed going, and what game they were to hunt, while Prince Janusz sent one of his courtiers to the town to fetch two of his warriors who were in the habit of dragging bison from the toils by their horns and breaking the backbones of bears, in order to show them to the King.

Zbyszko was most anxious to salute the King, but could not get an opportunity because of the throng. Duke Jamont, however, having evidently forgotten the sharp answer given him by the young knight in Krakow, nodded to him in friendly fashion from a distance, giving him at the same time a sign to approach as soon as he could. At this moment a hand touched his shoulder, and a sweet voice said in his ear:

"Zbyszko!"

The youth turned round and beheld Jagienka. Hitherto he had been unable to approach her, so she herself had

profited by the stir caused by the King's arrival and had come over to him.

"Zbyszko," she repeated, "may God and the Holy Virgin comfort you!"

"God bless you!" answered the knight.

He gazed gratefully into her blue eyes, then dimmed as if with dew. They stood facing each other in silence, for though she came to him like a kind, compassionate sister, she now seemed to him so different from the Jagienka he had known that for a moment he felt he could not dare to speak to her as of old. As for her, she felt that, after having said what she had said, she had nothing more to tell him.

Presently the movement caused by the King's sitting down to supper released them from their embarrassment. The Princess Janusz again approached Zbyszko, and requested him to attend her at table. He was obliged, therefore, to leave Jagienka, and when the guests sat down he stood behind the Princess in order to change her dishes and serve her with water and wine. While so engaged he looked involuntarily from time to time at Jagienka, who sat beside the Princess of Plock, and he could not but admire her beauty. Formerly, when she rode through the forest in her sheepskin jacket, the leaves clinging to her dishevelled hair, one might have taken her for some pretty peasant girl; but now, at the first glance, it could be seen that she was a maid of high birth and breeding, such was the dignity reflected in her face. Zbyszko observed also that her former gaiety had vanished, but he wondered less at this, for he had heard of her father's death. He saw that many of the knights admired her as she sat, and that de Lorche in particular seemed rapt in ecstasy as he looked at her.

Although Zbyszko felt drawn towards Jagienka, for he knew that in his sorrow he should find no more compassionate heart than hers, he could find no other opportunity to speak to her that evening. The Princesses and the ladies, moreover, rose from table before the King, the Princes and the knights, who were accustomed to carouse far into the night, and Jagienka, as she left the courtyard, was only able to smile towards him as she passed.

It was almost daybreak when the young knight, de

Lorche, and their two grooms set out for the inn. For a time all walked along in silence, but as they approached the house the Lorrainer began talking to his groom, a Pomeranian who spoke Polish well.

Presently the groom addressed Zbyszko.

"My master," said he, "would ask your worship whether the lady with whom you spoke before the banquet began is really a mortal, and not an angel or a saint."

"Tell your master," answered Zbyszko somewhat impatiently, "that he asked me the same question once before, and that I wonder to hear him speak so. For in Spychow he told me he was going to Prince Witold's court because of the beauty of the Lithuanian ladies; then, for the same reason, he would go to Plock; then, in Plock, he would challenge the Pan of Taczew for the sake of Agnieszka of Dlugolas; and now he is thinking again of another maid. Is this his constancy and chivalrous faith?"

On hearing this answer from the lips of the Pomeranian, de Lorche sighed deeply and gazed for a time at the sky, which was beginning to pale before the coming dawn.

"You are right," he said at length, "I have neither constancy nor faith! I am a sinful man, and unworthy to wear knight's spurs. As for Panna Agnieszka of Dlugolas, it is true I did vow to her, and in that God help me to persevere! But when I tell you how cruelly she dealt with me at the castle of Czersk, you will pity me."

He sighed and again gazed at the sky, which in the east began to show a streak of gradually increasing brightness. Then, waiting until the Pomeranian had translated his words, he continued:

"She told me that she had an enemy in the form of a certain sorcerer, who lived in a tower in the forest and sent out a dragon against her every spring, and that the monster came close to the walls of Czersk seeking to take her. I forthwith declared that I would fight the dragon. But alas, listen! When I came to the spot she had indicated, I indeed beheld an awful monster lying motionless in wait for me, whereat my heart overflowed with joy; but when I charged the dragon with my lance what do you think I saw? A huge sack of chaff mounted on wooden pegs, with a tail of plaited

straw! And so I won not fame but ridicule, and I suffered also grievous hurt in the lists at the hands of two Mazovian knights whom I was afterwards obliged to challenge."

At any other time Zbyszko would certainly have laughed, but now he only said:

"Perhaps she did it in frolic and not out of malice."

"For that reason I forgave her," said de Lorche, "and the proof is that I would have fought the Knight of Taczew for the sake of her beauty and virtue."

"Do not do so," said Zbyszko gravely.

"I know it would mean death, but I prefer to be slain than live in ceaseless sorrow and affliction."

"Such things no longer enter Pan Powala's head; it were better to come with me to see him to-morrow and gain his friendship."

"I will do so! Has he not already pressed me to his heart? But to-morrow he goes hunting with the King."

"Then we shall go in the morning. The King loves the chase, but he does not scorn sleep, and to-night he was revelling late."

On going to the castle in the morning they were met by Prince Janusz, who invited them to join his suite so that they might take part in the hunt which had been arranged for the day. While riding to the forest, Zbyszko found an opportunity to speak with Duke Jamont, and from him he heard good news.

"When undressing the King for bed," he said, "I reminded him of you and your adventure in Krakow. The Knight Powala was present also, and he added that the Knights of the Cross had seized your uncle, and begged the King to interpose on his behalf. The King, who is already wroth with the Krzyzaks, grew still more enraged against them. 'Not with soft words,' said he, 'will I go to them, but with a spear! a spear! a spear!' And Powala purposely threw more fuel on the fire. In the morning, when the Teuton envoys were waiting at the gate, the King did not even glance at them, though they bowed to the very ground. Now they will never obtain his promise not to aid Prince Witold, and they will not know what to do. But you—be sure the King will not fail to press the Grand Master himself on behalf of your uncle."

Although Jagienka accompanied the Princess of Plock to the forest, there was sufficient liberty during the chase

to enable her to reach Zbyszko's side. She had, she told him, already learnt of Macko's captivity from the Bohemian, and had lost no time in speaking to the Princess, who at once gave her a letter to the Grand Master and, moreover, prevailed upon von Wenden, the Komthur of Thorn, to make mention of the matter in a letter wherein he gave an account of the proceedings in Plock. He had since boasted to the Princess that in the letter he had told the Grand Master that if he wished to conciliate the King no difficulties must be raised in the affair.

"Thus I have done all I could, so that no time should be lost," said Jagienka, "and as the King has little mind to yield to his sister in weighty matters, he will certainly try to grant her any small favour she may wish, and so I hope for the best."

"If we had not treacherous men to do with," said Zbyszko, "I should simply bring the ransom and there would be an end, but with them the likelihood is that they would keep the money as well as the person who brought it unless he had power behind him."

"I know it well," said Jagienka.

"Now you know all," said Zbyszko, "and as long as I live I shall be grateful to you."

"Why do not you call me Jagienka, seeing I am your friend since childhood?" she asked, raising towards him her sad, kind eyes.

"I do not know," he answered sincerely. "It seems somewhat difficult to me—and you are not the fire-brand you used to be, but something—something, as if . . ."

"Because I am older by several years," she interrupted; "and the Germans slew my father in Silesia."

"True! God grant him eternal light!"

They rode along beside each other in silence, both thoughtful and seemingly engaged in listening to the murmur of the evening breeze among the pine trees. Presently Jagienka broke the silence:

"And when you have ransomed Macko will you remain in this country?"

Zbyszko looked at her as if startled, for until then he had been so entirely given up to his sorrow that it had not even occurred to him to think about the future.

"I do not know," he said after a few moments' meditation. "Merciful Jesus! How should I know? I only know that wherever I wander my grief will still be with me. . . . When I have ransomed my uncle I shall probably join Prince Witold in order to perform my vows against the Knights of the Cross—and, perhaps, to perish."

The girl's eyes grew dim and, stooping towards him, she said in a low voice, as if entreating him:

"You must not perish! No, you must not perish!"

Again they were silent. Only on reaching the town walls Zbyszko shook off the thoughts that oppressed him.

"And you—Jagienka . . . " he said, "will you remain here at court?"

"No," she answered. "I yearn for my brothers and for Zgorzelice. Cztań and Wilk are doubtless married, and even if they are not I no longer fear them."

"God grant that my uncle Macko may take you back to Zgorzelice. He is so fond of you that you may rely upon him in everything. But you too will always remember him."

"I swear to you that I will always be to him as his own child!"

And when she had said these words she burst into tears, for she was very sad at heart.

Next day Powala of Taczew came to see Zbyszko at the inn.

"After Corpus Christi," said he, "the King will at once go to Raciazek to meet the Grand Master. Meanwhile, you have been made one of the King's knights, and will set out along with us."

Zbyszko flushed with pleasure at these words, for his admission into the body of royal knights would not only secure him against Teutonic treachery and deceit, but would also cover him with glory, for his comrades would now be the most famous knights of Poland and of other lands, Zawisza the Black and his brothers Farurej and Kruszek, Powala himself and Krzon of Kozięglowy, Stach of Charbimowice, Paszko of Biskupice, Lis of Targowisko and many others of renown. King Jagiello took only a small number as his escort, for some remained behind and others were seeking adventures in far countries across the sea; but he knew that with these he could go even to

Marienburg without fear of German perfidy. Therefore the young heart of Zbyszko kindled at the thought that he would have such comrades. For a moment he forgot even his sorrow and, seizing Powala's hands, he exclaimed joyfully:

"I owe this to you, Pan, and to no one else! To you, to you, to you!"

"To me partly," answered Powala, "and partly to the Princess of Plock; but most of all to our gracious Sovereign, to whom you must at once go and pay homage, lest he should suspect you of ingratitude."

"By Heaven!" he cried, "I am ready to die for him!"

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE conference at Raciazek, to which the King went after Corpus Christi, did not lead to such results as that held there two years later, when the King regained the town and province of Dobrzyn, which had been treacherously pledged to the Knights of the Cross by the Prince of Opole. Jagiello arrived greatly irritated by the calumnies which the Order had spread concerning him among the Western courts and even at Rome, and at the same time he was angry with the Order for its dishonesty. But now the Grand Master did not wish to negotiate concerning Dobrzyn, anxious that the King's promise not to help Prince Witold should first be obtained. The royal advisers, who were quick-witted enough to perceive the Teuton deceit, replied: "When your power increases, your arrogance will grow still more! You say you have nothing to do with Lithuania, and yet you would set Skirgiell on the throne in Wilno. But that is the heritage of Jagiello, who appoints whom he will to be Prince; therefore beware, lest our great King punish you!" To this the Grand Master replied that, as the King was the real lord of Lithuania, it was for him to command Witold to desist from war and restore Samogitia to the Order; otherwise, he declared, the Order must strike at Witold where it was best able to reach and wound him. Thus the disputes dragged on from morning till night. The King lost patience more and more, and told the Grand Master that, were Samogitia happy under the Order's rule, Witold would not stir even a finger, for he would have neither reason nor pretext.

Next day the discussion of less important affairs was begun. The King taxed the Order sharply with maintaining bands of rogues, with attacks and robberies on the frontier, with the abduction of Jurand's daughter and of Jasko of Kretkow, and with the murder of peasants

and fishermen. The Grand Master swore that such things were done without his knowledge, and in turn charged the Polish knights with helping the heathen Samogitians against the Knights of the Cross. As an instance of this he mentioned Macko of Bogdaniec. Happily the King had learnt from Powala the purpose of the Knights of Bogdaniec in travelling to Samogitia, and was able to answer the charge, the more so as Zbyszko himself was present and the brothers von Baden formed part of the Grand Master's suite.

The Knights of the Cross had intended, in the event of all going well with them, to invite the King to Thorn and there give banquets and tournaments in his honour. In view of the failure of the negotiations, however, there was little desire for such amusement. Only in the morning hours did the knights try their strength and dexterity with one another, but this was little to the taste of the Knights of the Cross, for Powala of Taczew appeared to have greater strength of arm than Arnold von Baden, Dobek of Olesnica to be more expert with the spear, while Lis of Targowisko excelled all in leaping over the horses. It was on one of these occasions that Zbyszko found an opportunity to come to an understanding with Arnold von Baden as to the ransom. Although Arnold was somewhat covetous by nature he was desirous to abate the price, but to this Zbyszko would by no means agree, maintaining that his honour required him to pay the full price, whereupon the knights, Polish as well as German, praised him saying: "It is indeed right that this young man should wear the belt and spurs!"

Meanwhile the King and the Grand Master succeeded in coming to an agreement concerning the exchange of prisoners, and here many strange things were revealed. While the prisoners in Polish hands were for the most part grown men taken in battle and in encounters on the frontier, those in the hands of the Knights of the Cross were mostly women and children who had been captured in night attacks for the sake of ransom. Even the Pope in Rome heard of it, and notwithstanding all the cunning explanations of Johann vom Felde, the Order's representative at the Holy See, his Holiness was loud in his wrath and indignation against the Order.

With regard to Macko the Grand Master raised diffi-

culties, not in good earnest, but merely to give weight to his own concessions. He even maintained that a Christian knight who fought with the Samogitians against the Order ought justly to be condemned to death. It was in vain that the King's counsellors adduced the fearful wrongs that Jurand and his daughter had suffered, as well as those to which the Knights of Bogdaniec had been subjected.

"You would have men take you for lambs," said the Grand Master, "and our people for wolves! Yet not one of the four wolves who took part in the abduction of Jurand's daughter is left alive, while the lambs go about the world in safety."

"Yes," said the Pan of Taczew, who stood by, "but was any one of them slain by treachery? Did not all perish with their swords in their hands?"

To this the Master could find no answer, and, seeing that the King began to frown and flash his eyes in anger, he at length gave way. It was then agreed that each side should send envoys to bring back the prisoners. On the Polish side those appointed were Zyndram of Maszkow, who desired to examine the Teuton power, Powala of Taczew, and Zbyszko of Bogdaniec. It was to the influence of Duke Jamont with the King that the young knight owed this favour.

"Von Wenden, the Komthur of Thorn, arrived yesterday," said the Duke after Zbyszko had thanked him, "and to-night you are to go to him with the Grand Master and his suite."

"And then to Marienburg?"

"And then to Marienburg. It will not be a long journey," the Duke went on, with a laugh, "but it may be somewhat unpleasant, for the Germans have obtained nothing from the King, and they will have little pleasure with Witold. They say he has gathered together the whole strength of Lithuania and will set out for Samogitia."

"Then, if the King assist him, there will be a great war?"

"All our knights pray Heaven for that. But even should the King refrain from war, he will aid him with corn and money, and many Polish knights will join Witold as volunteers."

"Assuredly! But for that reason the Order itself may declare war against the King?"

"No," answered the Duke. "As long as the present Grand Master lives, that it will not do."

The journey to Marienburg served to confirm Zbyszko in his previous conviction that Konrad von Jungingen, the Grand Master, was neither cruel nor depraved. He was often forced to act wrongly, for the whole Order was established on iniquity. He was compelled to lie, for he had inherited lying with the insignia of his rank, and from his early youth he had been accustomed to regard it as mere political craft. But he was not bloodthirsty; he feared God's judgments, and, as far as he was able, he restrained the haughtiness and insolence of the Order's chief officers, who aimed at a conflict with the might of Jagiello. But he was weak. For centuries the Order had been so accustomed to lie in wait for the property of others, to rob, to take by force or fraud the lands adjacent to their own, that Konrad was not merely unable to check their rapacious greed, but involuntarily submitted to it and even exerted himself to satisfy it. The days of Winrich von Kniprode, whose iron discipline had made the Order the wonder of the whole world, were long since past. Even under the previous Grand Master, Konrad Wallenrod, they had become intoxicated with their ever increasing power, fame, and prosperity, and the restraints that had hitherto served to strengthen them had been relaxed. The Grand Master enforced law and justice as far as he could, softening by his personal influence the Order's iron hand, which weighed heavily on the peasants and burgesses, and even on the clergy and gentry who held their lands under the Knights of the Cross, so that in the neighbourhood of Marienburg many of the lower classes enjoyed not merely easy circumstances but even some measure of wealth. But in the more remote provinces the arbitrary power, cruelty and licentiousness of the komthurs trampled the law under foot, exercising everywhere oppression and extortion, wresting the last farthing from the people by means of despotic taxes, levied often without even a pretext, shedding everywhere tears and blood, so that over the whole land there rose but one complaint, one groan, one cry of despair.

Even when the welfare of the Order required—as it sometimes did in Samogitia—the exercise of greater mildness, such measures were rendered of no effect because

of the unruliness and inborn cruelty of the komthurs. Thus Konrad von Jungingen felt like a charioteer who, while driving wild horses, lets the reins slip from his grasp and commits the chariot to the mercy of Fate. His soul was often oppressed with evil presentiments, and often did these prophetic words traverse his mind: "I made them to be industrious as bees, and placed them on the threshold of Christian lands, but lo! they rise against Me. For they care not for the souls of men, and spare not the bodies of the people who, turning from error, became converts to the Catholic faith and to Me. They have made slaves of them, and teach them not the commandments of God; they deprive them of the Holy Sacraments, and condemn them to greater torments hereafter than if they had remained in heathendom. They wage war only in order to glut their own covetousness. Therefore the day shall come when their teeth will be broken, their right hand will be cut off, and their right leg will be lamed, that they may acknowledge their sins!"

Konrad knew that these reproaches, directed against the Knights of the Cross by the mysterious Voice in the Revelations of Saint Bridget, were well merited. He knew that the edifice which was built upon the lands and the rights of others, and was propped up by lies, fraud, and cruelty, could not last for ever. He feared that, having been long undermined by floods of blood and tears, it would fall to the ground at the first blow from the mighty hand of Poland. He foresaw that the chariot drawn by wild horses must at last be precipitated into the abyss, and he exerted himself to ensure that the hour of judgment, wrath, disgrace, and overthrow should be delayed as long as possible. For this reason, in spite of his weakness, he resisted his haughty and insolent counsellors inflexibly in one thing: he would not sanction a war with Poland. In vain did they reproach him with cowardice and impotence; in vain did the border komthurs spur him with all their might towards war. When the fire was on the point of breaking out he would yield at the last moment, and would afterwards thank God that he had been able to stay the sword that swayed over the head of the Order.

Yet he knew that it must come to this, and the consciousness that the Order was based, not upon God's laws,

but upon lies and wickedness, together with his own forebodings of an approaching day of ruin, made him one of the most unhappy of men. He would assuredly have given his own life and blood, if, haply, it could be otherwise—if only there might yet be time to return to the ways of righteousness. But he felt that it was too late. To return would mean the restoration to their rightful owners of all the rich, fertile lands seized by the Order, and with these many towns, some as wealthy as Dantzic. Nor would this be enough. They would have to renounce Samogitia, desist from all attempts against Lithuania, put the sword back into the scabbard, abandon all those lands where the Order had no more people to convert, and, perhaps, re-establish themselves in Palestine or on some Grecian island, there to defend the Cross against the Saracens. But this was impossible, for it would be equivalent to a death sentence against them. And who would agree to it? What Master could demand anything of the kind? Konrad would have been the first to condemn to the dark cell, as a man bereft of his senses, anyone who should proffer such counsel. They must go on until the day when God Himself should stop them.

So he went on, but in sorrow and oppression of soul. His hair and beard were already silvery, and his formerly keen eyes were now half-closed by their heavy lids. Zbyszko did not once perceive a smile on his face. Konrad's features were not menacing or even gloomy, but indicated rather the weariness of secret suffering. Encased in his armour, which bore on the breastplate a cross with a black eagle enclosed in a quadrangle in the centre, and wearing a great white cloak, also adorned with a cross, he produced an impression of majestic gravity and sorrow. At one time Konrad had been merry and a lover of sports, and even now he did not shun magnificent banquets, pageants, and tournaments; but neither in the resplendent throng of knights who accompanied him as guests to Marienburg, nor in the clangour of the lists, amid the blare of trumpets and the clash of arms, nor at the board, laden with brimming beakers of wine—not once did his face brighten. While everything around seemed to breathe of greatness, splendour, inexhaustible riches and unbending power, while the envoys of the Emperor and of other Western monarchs shouted enthusiastically that the Order alone

could accomplish more than all other kingdoms together, or the united power of the whole world—Konrad did not deceive himself, and he alone recalled the ill-omened words revealed to Saint Bridget: “The day shall come when their teeth will be broken, their right hand will be cut off, and their right leg will be lamed, that they may acknowledge their sins!”

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THEY proceeded through Chelmza to Graudenz, where they stayed one day and night in order that the Grand Master might decide a dispute concerning the fisheries which was in suspense between the German starosta of the castle and the landowners whose estates were adjacent to the Vistula. The Grand Master was curious to see what impression the Teutonic power would make upon the three knights, and especially on Zyndram of Maszkow, for in the whole Polish kingdom there was no one so skilled in warfare as he. Konrad knew that his opinion carried great weight in the King's council, and he believed that if the Order's strength and wealth should strike him with awe, the war might long be delayed. The mere sight of Marienburg struck the heart of every Pole with dread, for the fortress,* with its upper, middle and lower castles, was without an equal in the world. As they sailed on the Nogat from Graudenz towards Marienburg, the knights saw in the distance the outlines of its great towers against the sky. The day was clear and, as the boats drew near, the tower of the church over the upper castle, and the gigantic walls, rising one above the other, became more and more distinct. The hugeness of the walls exceeded anything that the Polish knights had ever seen. Such extraordinary might shone forth from the gigantic nest of armed monks that even the long, grave face of Konrad lightened a little at the sight.

"Ex luto Marienburg," said he, addressing Zyndram, "but this mud no human power will crumble!"

Zyndram made no reply, but silently surveyed the towers and the huge walls strengthened with great scarps.

* Marienburg was laid in ruins by Frederick II., King of Prussia, after the fall of the Polish Commonwealth.

"You, Pan, who are a judge of strongholds," said Konrad after a few moments, "what do you think of this?"

"The fortress seems to me impregnable," said the Polish knight, as if musingly, "but"

"But what? What fault can you find with it?"

"But—every fortress may change masters."

The Grand Master knit his brows.

"What do you mean by such words?"

"I mean that the judgments and decrees of Heaven are hidden from human eyes."

And again he looked thoughtfully at the walls, while Zbyszko, to whom Powala had translated his answer, gazed upon him with admiration and gratitude.

"They say," said Konrad presently, not wishing the Polish knight to have the last word, "that our Marienburg is six times as large as the Wawel."

"There, on the rock, we have less room than you here, on the plain," answered Zyndram, "but the heart of the Wawel is bigger."

"I do not understand," said Konrad, raising his brows in amazement.

"What is the heart of every castle but its church? Our cathedral is three times as large as that church yonder." As he spoke he pointed towards the church, which was indeed small, but on the presbytery of which shone a gigantic mosaic figure of the Holy Virgin on a golden background.

"Your answers are ready but strange, Pan," said the Grand Master, again displeased with the turn taken by the conversation.

At this moment they arrived. The excellent watch of the Order had, apparently, already apprised the town and the castle of the Grand Master's approach, for at the ferry there were already in waiting, not only a number of the brothers, but the trumpeters of the town who were in the habit of playing during the passage of the Head of the Order. Horses were ready on the other side; those the company mounted, and after traversing the town and passing through the Shoemakers' Gate and by the Sparrows' Tower, they entered the lower castle. In the gateway the Grand Master was saluted by the Grand Komthur Wilhelm von Helfenstein, the Grand Hospitaller Konrad von Lichtenstein, a cousin of Kuno von

Lichtenstein, the Grand Wardrobe-keeper Rumpenheim, the Grand Treasurer Burghard von Wobecke, and many ordained and lay brothers. The tall, strong frames of the Knights (for the Order would not admit men who were unfit), their broad shoulders, their curly beards, and their fierce aspect, gave them the look of rapacious German robber-knights. Courage, pride and unmeasured insolence looked forth from their eyes. They did not love Konrad because of his fear of war with the power of Jagiello, and often in the meeting of the Chapter they reproached him with cowardice, and sometimes they would even draw his features on the castle walls, thus inciting the jesters to deride him openly. Nevertheless, seeing that he came in the company of strange knights, they now bowed their heads in feigned humility in his presence, and rushed in a body to hold his stirrup and the bridle of his horse.

Having dismounted, the Grand Master turned to von Helfenstein and asked:

"Have you any news from Werner von Tetlingen?"

Werner von Tetlingen was the Grand Marshal, or commander of the Order's armed forces, and was then leading an expedition against the Samogitians and Prince Witold.

"There is no important news," replied von Helfenstein, "but some damage has been done. The savages have burnt down some settlements near Ragnet and some hamlets near other castles."

"We must trust to God that one great battle will crush their wickedness and obduracy," said the Grand Master. And he raised his eyes to Heaven, his lips moving for a time as if in prayer for the success of the Order. He then pointed to the Polish knights and said:

"Here are envoys from the Polish King: the Knight of Maszkow, the Knight of Taczew, and the Knight of Bogdaniec, who have come with us in order to exchange prisoners. Let the castle komthur show them the guests' chambers, and receive and treat them fitly."

At these words the knight-brothers looked with curiosity upon the strangers, and particularly on Powala of Taczew, whose name was known to many of them. Some recognised Zbyszko, who had fought in the lists at Marienburg, and they greeted him affably, remembering his friendship with Ulrich, the powerful brother of the

Grand Master. The least attention was excited by Zyndram of Maszkow, one day to be one of the most terrible of the Order's conquerors. When he dismounted he seemed nearly hunchbacked by reason of his extraordinary shortness and high shoulders, and his excessively long arms and crooked legs provoked smiles among the younger brothers. One of them, a well-known jester, even approached him in order to banter him, but on looking into the eyes of the Pan of Maszkow he somehow lost his desire and went off in silence.

Meanwhile the komthur conducted the guests through a small courtyard and over the bridge of Saint Nicholas into the lower castle proper. Zyndram closely examined the walls and the different buildings pointed out by the guide as they proceeded.

"The huge pile of buildings which your worships see to the front and left," said the komthur, "are our stables. We are only poor monks, but they say that elsewhere knights are worse housed than our horses."

"No one suspects you of poverty," answered Powala, "but here there must be something more than stables, for the building is very high, and you surely do not lead your horses up the stairs."

"Above the stables," said the komthur, "which are on the ground and have room for four hundred horses, there are granaries full of corn sufficient to last ten years. Here it will never come to a siege; nevertheless, even if it were to come, then we should not be forced to surrender through hunger."

They turned to the right and again passed over a bridge between the Saint Lawrence and the Armour Towers, which led them into another more spacious courtyard in the middle of the lower castle. This courtyard was separated from the middle castle by a moat and a drawbridge. At the castle gate, which was situated considerably higher, the knights turned back at the request of the komthur and surveyed the immense square mass of the lower castle. To Zyndram it was as if he beheld a whole town. He saw inexhaustible stores of timber stacked as tall as houses, piles of stone balls like pyramids, hospitals, warehouses, stables, barracks, dwelling-houses, granaries, bakehouses, foundries, an enormous arsenal, and prisons—each building so massive and strongly fortified as to form a separate

stronghold, the whole surrounded by a great wall surmounted by many threatening towers. Beyond the wall was a moat, beyond the moat a girdle of gigantic stakes, and beyond the palisade rolled the yellow waters of the Nogat. Towards the north and east glittered the surface of an enormous lake, while to the south rose the still stronger fortifications of the middle and upper castles.

It was a terrible stronghold, resplendent in its haughty, unyielding strength, wherein were concentrated the greatest forces then known—the spiritual power and the might of the sword. He who resisted the one was crushed by the other. He who raised his hand against the Order drew forth from every Christian land the cry that he raised his hand against the Cross.

Knights thronged from every quarter to lend their aid. The stronghold swarmed with artisans and warriors, and in the streets and at the gates there was a perpetual stir and din as at a fair. In the courtyards all languages might be heard, for there were knights and soldiers of all nations: English archers who could strike a pigeon at a hundred paces, and whose arrows pierced a cuirass like cloth; Swiss and Danish foot-soldiers; French knights, inclined alike to laughter and to quarrels; Spanish nobles, taciturn and proud; Italian knights, skilful in fence, clad in mail wrought in Venice, Milan, and Florence; Burgundians and Frieslanders; and Teuton knights and soldiers from every German land. Monarchs came not only to wage war against the heathen, or to borrow money, but also to learn the art of government, for none knew better than the Order how to rule men and conduct hostilities. When the Knights of the Cross had first come to Marienburg, except for a small parcel of land and a few castles given them by an incautious Polish prince, they did not possess a single foot of territory. But now they owned an extensive country larger than many a kingdom, full of fertile lands, mighty towns and impregnable fortresses. Several Prussian peoples speaking the Lithuanian tongue had been wiped from the face of the earth. Lithuania herself had until recently felt the iron foot of the Knights, which pressed so terribly on her breast that with her every breath she gave forth her heart's blood. Poland, although victorious in the terrible battle of Plowce, had, in the time of Lokietek, lost her possessions on the left bank of the

Vistula, together with Dantzig, Tczew, Gniiew, and Swiec. The Order of the Livonian Knights extended as far as the Ruthenian provinces, and the two Orders were advancing from the German sea like a great wave, gradually overflowing the Slavonian lands.

But suddenly the sun of Teutonic prosperity was hidden behind a cloud. Lithuania had accepted baptism at the hands of Poland, and Jagiello, on his marriage with the beautiful Jadwiga, had taken possession of the throne of Krakow. Hereby the Order did not lose a single province or castle, but it felt that its power was now confronted by another power, and that it had lost its reason of existence in Prussia. After the baptism of Lithuania it ought to have returned to Palestine in order to protect the pilgrims who made their way towards the Holy City. But to return would have meant the giving up of power, wealth, dominion, towns, lands, and whole kingdoms. Therefore the Order began to toss about in fear and frenzy, like some great dragon into whose flank an iron dart has been plunged. Although the Grand Master feared to stake all on one cast of the dice, and trembled at the thought of a war with the great King who ruled over the Polish and Lithuanian lands and the extensive Ruthenian territory which Olgierd snatched from the jaws of the Tartars, most of the Teuton knights felt that a deadly combat must be fought ere the glory of the Order had grown pale, ere the thunderbolts of the Pope should be launched against their stronghold, to which the maintenance of heathendom, and not the spread of Christianity, was now a matter of life and death.

Meanwhile among the nations and at foreign Courts they spread reports that the baptism of Jagiello and of Lithuania was feigned and false, declaring that it was impossible that what the Order had been unable to achieve in several generations could have been done by others in a single year. They stirred up kings and knights against Poland and her King, as against the ministers and defenders of heathendom, and their accusations, distrusted only in Rome, spread like a great wave over the world, and drew towards Marienburg many dukes, counts, and knights from the south and west. Marienburg with its formidable castles dazzled everyone by its strength, by its wealth, by its seeming discipline; to everyone the Order appeared mightier and more enduring than

ever. And none among the dukes, the counts, and the knights who came as guests—none among the Knights of the Cross themselves, except the Grand Master—understood that with the baptism of Lithuania something had happened as if the waters of the Nogat, by which one side of the fortress was protected, had begun to wash its walls silently and relentlessly away. None understood that, although the strength still remained in its gigantic body, the soul had fled for ever. All, as they looked for the first time on Marienburg raised “*ex luto*,” as they beheld the walls, the towers, and the black cross on the gates, the buildings and the garments—all were impelled to the belief that even the gates of Hell could not prevail against it.

With such thoughts Powala of Taczew and Zbyszko, who had already seen the fortress, gazed on Marienburg. And when Zyndram of Maszkow, who was much more clear-sighted in such things than they, looked once more on the swarm of armed warriors girded within their gigantic bulwark of walls and towers, his face, too, grew dark, and he involuntarily recalled the proud words with which the Knights of the Cross had formerly threatened King Kasimierz: “Our might is greater than yours, and if you will not yield we will pursue you with our swords even to the walls of Krakow!”

But meanwhile the komthur led the knights on to the middle castle, where, in the eastern row, the chambers of the guests were situated.

CHAPTER LXIX.

MACKO and Zbyszko embraced long, for they loved each other much, and their common adventures and misfortunes during the past few years had strengthened their affection still more. The old knight guessed by the first glance at his nephew's face that Danusia was no longer alive. For a time, therefore, he asked no questions, but clasped the youth firmly to his bosom to show how fully he shared his distress. After a long silence Macko said:

"Did they seize her from you again, or did she die in your arms?"

"She died in my arms—near to Spychow." And Zbyszko began to tell him all that had happened.

"And Jurand, does he yet live?" asked Macko.

"I left Jurand alive, but he is not long for this world; I do not hope to see him again."

"Then, perhaps, it were better not to have left him."

"How could I leave you here?"

"To me a couple of weeks sooner or later makes no difference."

"But you have assuredly suffered here; you look as weak and thin as Piotrowin."

"The sun warms the outer world, but in the dungeon it is always cold and damp, because of the water surrounding the castle. I thought I should have grown musty. It was impossible to breathe; and with all this my wound began to bleed afresh."

"Then the hounds kept you in a dungeon!"

Macko nodded his head.

"To tell the truth, they were not too friendly towards me. There is much rancour here against Witold and the Samogitians, but more against those of us who help them. They love money more than vengeance, and would have cut off my head had it not been for the ransom. Besides, they wished to keep me in their hands as a

proof that the King sends Poles to help the heathen. Yet we know, for we have been there, that the Samogitians ask baptism, only not from the Order's hands; but the Knights of the Cross feign that they do not know it, and malign them and our King at all foreign Courts."

Macko panted, and paused for a few moments to regain his breath.

"I might have perished in my dungeon," he resumed, "but luckily de Lorche heard of me from Arnold von Baden and at once raised a great pother. He is held in the highest esteem here, for he is of a very great family and is very wealthy. So he told them that he himself was our prisoner, and that if they took my life, or even should I perish of hunger or the dampness, then you would certainly strike off his head. He threatened the Chapter that he would tell at Western Courts how the Order dealt with dubbed knights. Then they were afraid, and I was removed into the hospital, where the air and the food are better."

"So help me, Heaven!" exclaimed Zbyszko. "I will not take even a single mark from de Lorche!"

"It is pleasant to take from an enemy, but it is also just to forgive a friend," said Macko. "I have heard that the King has made an arrangement concerning the exchange of prisoners, and in that case you need not pay for me also."

"And what of our word of honour?" asked Zbyszko. "Arnold would be able to charge us with dishonesty."

Macko was embarrassed, but, after a little hesitation, he said:

"But now we could bargain for a lower price."

"We put the price on ourselves. Are we now worth less?"

The old man was still more embarrassed, but in his eyes could be seen a look of admiration and love for his nephew.

"He knows how to guard his honour!" he muttered with a sigh.

"You know that we have money enough," said Zbyszko; "if only our fate were not so hard!"

"Heaven will yet soften yours," said the old knight with emotion; "as for me, my days are numbered."

"You must not say so! As soon as you feel the wind blowing against you, you will be quite well again."

"The wind! The wind bends a young tree and breaks an old one."

"But you are yet far from being old. You must not be downcast!"

"I have other reasons for being downcast. Do you remember how I rebuked you in Skirwoillo's camp for extolling the power of the Knights of the Cross?" Here Macko lowered his voice, as if afraid lest he should be overheard. "Now I see that you were right, and not I. Heaven help us! What might is theirs! Our knights' fingers itch to get at the Germans, and here also they say that it must come to a great war; but when it does come, God have mercy on our King and nation! God grant that the King's envoys may perceive their strength, and especially the Knight of Maszkow!"

"I saw that he grew gloomy," said Zbyszko. "He is a great warrior; no one, they say, knows more of warfare than he."

"In that case there will probably be no war."

"If the Knights of the Cross see that they are the stronger, then there will be war. And to tell the truth, I hope there will be, for we can endure it no longer."

"Yet I fear that God may punish us for our great audacity," said Macko. "Remember how our knights, before the Cathedral in Krakow—when they were about to execute you but did not—defied Timur the Lame himself, who is lord of forty kingdoms and has made mountains of human skulls. They have not enough in the Knights of the Cross! They must needs challenge all at once! It may be an offence against Heaven!"

At the mention of Krakow, Zbyszko was overcome anew with terrible grief.

"And who but she saved me from the axe!" he cried, tearing his hair. "O Jesus! Danusia! . . . O Jesus! . . ."

For a time he was unable to restrain and calm himself, but seeing that Macko, who was still weak and ill, was so affected by the sight of his grief that he staggered and fell on the bench in a swoon, he at length mastered his feelings. He laid the old knight on a bed of boards, refreshed him with wine sent by the komthur, and watched by him until he fell asleep.

Next day they rose late, and Zbyszko was then much more composed, while his uncle felt better and stronger.

Presently Hlawa entered and informed them that they were both invited by the Grand Master to a banquet in the refectory with the other envoys.

"Listen, Hlawa," said Macko. "To-day, after I have eaten and feel strong enough, we will set out."

"Whither?" asked the Bohemian.

"To Mazovia, to be sure—to Spychow," said Zbyszko.

"And shall we remain there?"

Macko looked inquiringly at Zbyszko, for as yet they had not spoken of their future movements. Doubtless the youth had decided, but apparently he did not wish to grieve his uncle, for he replied evasively:

"You must first recover completely from your illness."

"I do not say you must not go to Jurand," said Macko slowly, "for if he is to die we must bury him decently. But I say that this Spychow is an unlucky place. Any good that has befallen you has happened elsewhere; there you have had nothing but sorrow and affliction."

"It is true," said Zbyszko; "but Danusia's tomb is there . . ."

"Restrain yourself!" exclaimed Macko, fearing that the young knight's grief was about to break out afresh.

But Zbyszko, although sad, remained calm and, in a few moments, said:

"There will be time enough to consider it. In Plock, however, you must remain."

"Your worship will have no lack of attention," interrupted Hlawa.

"True!" said Zbyszko. "Do you know that Jagienka is here? She is maid of honour to the Princess Ziemowitowa. Surely, you must know, for you yourself brought her here. She was in Spychow also. I am surprised that you did not mention her to me when we were with Skirwoillo."

"Not only was she in Spychow, but without her Jurand would either be groping about with his staff until this day, or else have died by the roadside. I brought her to Plock because of the abbot's heritage, and I did not speak of her to you because, if I had done so, no good would have been done. At that time you paid no heed to anything."

"She loves you very much," said Zbyszko. "Thank God, no letters were needed! Still, she got letters from the Princess on your behalf and, with her help, others from the Teutonic envoys."

"God bless her for it!" said Macko. "There is none better than she in the world!"

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Zyndram of Maszkow and Powala of Taczew, who, having heard of Macko's swooning fit of the previous day, came to inquire for him.

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" said Zyndram as he crossed the threshold. "How fares it with you to-day?"

"I thank you. Tolerably well. Zbyszko says that if only I can feel the wind blowing about me I shall be quite myself again."

"Of course! He is quite right. All will then be well with you."

"I have taken a good rest," said Macko, "unlike your worships who, I am told, rose early."

"Yes," answered Zyndram; "many of the townspeople came to see us concerning the exchange of prisoners, and then we had to inspect this Teuton stronghold—the lower, middle and upper castles."

"A good household and strong castles!" muttered Macko gloomily.

"Assuredly they are strong. In the church there are Arab embellishments; the Knights say they learned that style of building from the Saracens in Sicily. In the castles there are wonderful chambers with great pillars standing either alone or in rows. The great refectory you yourselves shall see. Everything, moreover, is fortified in a fashion to be seen nowhere else. On such walls even the biggest of stone balls could make no impression. Faith, it is a joy to look upon!"

Zyndram spoke so lightly that Macko looked at him in astonishment.

"And their wealth, their troops, and their guests? Have you seen all?" he asked.

"They have shown us everything as if out of hospitality, but really so that our hearts should sink," said Zyndram.

"And what do you think of it?"

"If God grant that it come to war, then, I think, we shall drive them over the mountains and seas, whence they came."

"How so, Pan!" cried Macko, forgetting his illness and starting up in astonishment. "When I beheld their power I nearly swooned away. They say you are shrewd in war, but, by Heaven, I would fain learn why you think so!"

"These fortifications," answered Zyndram, "are as nothing, for what a human hand has raised a human hand can destroy. You know what keeps bricks together? Mortar! And people? Love! Among the people of this town, one has in captivity a son, another a brother, a third a cousin, a fourth a son-in-law or some other friend. The frontier komthurs order them to go and rob us, therefore many a man must be slain and taken by our people. They have already heard of the agreement between the King and the Grand Master, and since early morning they have been coming to us with the names of such prisoners, that they might be registered by our clerk. The first was a cooper, a wealthy German burgess owning a house in the town. 'If only I might render any service to your King and kingdom,' he said, 'I would sacrifice not only my estate but even my head!' I dismissed him, thinking he might be a Judas. But presently there came a secular priest from Oliwa on behalf of his brother. 'Is it true, Pan,' he asked, 'that you mean to declare war against our Prussian lords? For you must know that already all the people here, when they say, "Thy Kingdom come," think of your King.' Afterwards came many other people, and all said the same thing."

He paused, rose and looked to see whether anyone was listening at the doors. Then he returned and continued in a lower tone:

"I have inquired into this thoroughly. The Knights of the Cross are hated in all Prussia, by clergy and nobles, burgesses and peasants. And they are hated not only by the people speaking our tongue, but even by the Germans. Who must serve them, serves; but every one loves the Knights of the Cross less than the plague."

"But how does this concern the might of the Order?" asked Macko hesitatingly.

Zyndram stroked his great forehead with his hand, and meditated for a time as if seeking a comparison. At length he smiled as if to himself, and asked:

"Have you ever fought in the lists?"

"Assuredly, not seldom!" answered Macko.

"Then—tell me: Will not a knight—even the strongest—fall from his horse at the first blow, if his saddle-girth and stirrups are cut through?"

"To be sure, he will fall!"

“Well—look you! The Order is such a knight.”

“By Heaven!” exclaimed Zbyszko. “You will find nothing better in any book!”

Even Macko was moved, and his voice trembled a little as he said:

“God bless you, Pan! For your head the smith must assuredly make helms to your measure, for nowhere will you find one ready made!”

CHAPTER LXX.

MACKO and Zbyszko had hoped to leave Marienburg at once, but they did not set out on the same day upon which their minds had been so greatly eased by Zyndram, because of the banquet to which they had been invited. The supper had been prepared for a small company, and was served in the magnificent refectory, lighted by ten windows, the great vaulted roof of the hall being supported by a single pillar. At the strangers' table there sat, in addition to the royal knights, only one Swabian and one Burgundian count. The latter, although the subjects of wealthy sovereigns, had come on their behalf to borrow money from the Order. Besides the Grand Master, four high officers, called the Pillars of the Order, were present. They were the Grand Komthur, the Almoner, the Wardrobe-keeper, and the Treasurer. The fifth Pillar was the Grand Marshal, who was then leading the expedition against Witold.

Although the Order was vowed to poverty all ate from golden and silver dishes, for the Grand Master wished to dazzle the eyes of the Polish knights. The foreign knights, foreseeing that they would one day fight against the Poles, looked upon the envoys with no friendly eye, but the Knights of the Cross, fearing that the King might deem himself insulted should any offence be offered, had warned them beforehand to bear themselves with due restraint. Those of the guests whom the knights of the Order had sought to prejudice against the Poles by stories of their fury and brutality were surprised by the courtesy of Powala of Taczew, and were quick-witted enough to guess that the manners of the Poles were less rough than the tongues of the Knights of the Cross were malevolent and venomous.

Some, accustomed to the elegant amusements of the more polished Western Courts, were unfavourably im-

pressed by the manners of the Knights of the Cross themselves, for at the banquet the musicians were immoderately noisy, the songs of the minstrels coarse, the jests of the fools scurrilous, and there was also the dancing of bare-footed wenches. When they expressed surprise at the presence of women in the upper castle, they were told that the rule prohibiting them had long been broken, and that even the great Winrich von Kniprode had once danced there with the beautiful Mary von Altleben.

From time to time there was a lull in the general hubbub, and during one of these intervals Zyndram of Maszkow took the opportunity of asking the Grand Master, as if he himself were ignorant of the matter, whether the Order was greatly loved by its subjects in all lands.

"Whosoever loves the Cross must love the Order also," answered Konrad von Jungingen.

The answer pleased monks and guests, and many praised him for it.

"He who is our friend," continued the Grand Master, "does right well under our sway. As for him who is our enemy—with him we have two methods."

"What are these?" asked Zyndram.

"Perhaps your honour does not know that I usually descend to this refectory from my chambers by a small staircase built in the wall. In the staircase is a vaulted chamber. Were I to conduct your honour thither you would then know the first method."

"True! true!" exclaimed the brothers.

The Pan of Maszkow guessed that the Master spoke of the tower full of gold, of which the Knights of the Cross were wont to boast.

"Long ago," he said, after a few moments' reflection, "a German Emperor showed Skarbek, our envoy, such a chamber saying: 'Here I have means whereby I can defeat your master!' And Skarbek threw among the treasures a precious ring and said: 'Go gold to gold; we Poles love iron more!' And do your honours know what came of it? There was Hundsfield."

"What was Hundsfield?" asked many knights at once.

"It was a field," said Zyndram quietly, "where the Germans could not get themselves buried quick enough, so at last they were buried by the dogs."

Hereupon the knights and the brothers of the Order were perplexed, not knowing what answer to make.

"To contend with gold against iron is impossible," said Zyndram, as if in conclusion.

"Well!" exclaimed the Master, "our second method is—iron! Your honour has seen the armourers' workshops in the lower castle. There there is hammering night and day, and no such armour and swords are to be found in the world."

On hearing these words Powala of Taczew stretched out his hand and took from the centre of the table a sword an ell long and more than half a span broad, which was used for cutting the meat. With ease he rolled it into a tube like a parchment, held it up so that all might see it, and handed it to the Grand Master.

"If such is the iron of your swords," said he, with a complacent smile, "you will hardly accomplish much with them!"

The knights rose from their seats and crowded round the Master, while the rolled sword was passed from hand to hand. All were silent, for their hearts were struck with dismay at the sight of such strength.

"By the head of Saint Liborius!" exclaimed the Grand Master at length, "your hands, Pan, are of iron!"

"And of better iron than that," added the Burgundian count. "He rolled it up as if it had been of wax!"

"Such things are often done at our banquets," said Zyndram. "A smaller sword is sometimes rolled by one of our wenches."

The Germans, who loved to boast of their stature and strength, were ashamed and angry, and presently old Helfenstein called from one of the tables to the other:

"Brother Arnold von Baden! Show them that our bones also are not of church candles! Give him a sword!"

The servants at once brought one and laid it before Arnold, but whether he was confused by the presence of so many witnesses or whether his strength was really less than Powala's, he only bent the sword in two but could not roll it up. Seeing which many of the foreign guests, to whom the Knights of the Cross had often whispered that in winter there would be a war with King Jagiello, began to ponder; and some, suddenly recollecting that the winter in that land was usually terrible

in its severity, bethought themselves that it were best to return betimes to their own castles, beneath a milder sky. But it was strange that such thoughts should occur to them during the fine weather and the summer heat of July.

CHAPTER LXXI.

As the Prince, the Princess, and their children had gone to Czersk to visit the Princess Anna Danuta, Zbyszko and Macko, on reaching Plock, found none of the Court there. From the Bishop they learnt that Jagienka had gone to Spychow and was to remain with Jurand until his death. As they themselves desired to go to Spychow they were glad to think that they would see her there.

"It is long since I saw her," said Macko; "she must have grown, and is doubtless more lovely than ever."

"She has changed greatly," answered Zbyszko. "She was handsome always, even when she went about like a peasant girl, but now she is fit for any king's chamber."

"Has she indeed changed so much?" said Macko. "It will certainly be as I said," the old knight resumed, after an interval of silence, "she will wish to go to Zgorzelice. . . . And Bogdaniec! Heaven only knows whether Cztan and Wilk have taken their revenge on me for taking her away, or whether there is now a whole piece of timber in the place! I do not know whether I shall be able to defend myself against them when I return, for they are sturdy fellows, and I am old."

"As to that," said Zbyszko, "you had best speak thus to some one who does not know you."

"Had I not been ill in Marienburg, perhaps so," answered Macko, with a wave of his hand. "But we will speak further of this in Spychow."

After resting a night in Plock they set out for Spychow. The days were bright and the roads dry and safe, and on the morning of the fifth day they reached the castle. Jagienka, who regarded Macko as her best friend, greeted him as if he were her father, and the old knight, though not given to emotion, was deeply moved as he embraced the friendless girl. After inquiring for Jurand, Zbyszko went off to see him. Then Macko sighed deeply and said:

"Well! God has taken whom He wished to take, and has left whom He wished to leave! But now, I think, our hardships and our wanderings are over."

"But His hand has always protected you," said Jagienka.

"He has indeed protected us. But now, to speak frankly, it is time that we should return home."

"While Jurand lives we must remain here."

"How fares it with him now?"

"He looks upward and smiles, as if he already saw his Danusia in Paradise. He neither eats nor drinks, but only smiles continually."

"Let us go to him," said Macko; "Zbyszko also must now be there."

But Zbyszko had only remained a few moments by the side of Jurand, who now recognised no one. He had gone to the vault where Danusia lay, and there he stayed until old Tolima came to ask him to come to eat. As he came out he saw by the light of a torch that the coffin was covered with wreaths of cornflowers and marigolds, and that the floor was strewn with acorns, buttercups and lime-blossoms, whose sweet fragrance filled the place. At this sight the young knight's heart swelled, and he asked:

"Who has decked the coffin?"

"The Panienka of Zgorzelice," answered Tolima.

Zbyszko said nothing then, but a little later, when he saw Jagienka, he knelt before her and kissing her feet, exclaimed:

"May God repay you for your goodness, and for the flowers you have given Danusia!" Having said this he burst into tears, while she caressed his head like a sister comforting a weeping brother.

"Oh, my Zbyszko," she said, "would that I could console you better!"

And as she spoke the tears came to her eyes also.

CHAPTER LXXII.

IN a few days Jurand died. For a whole week Father Kaleb celebrated services by his body, which did not at all become decomposed, so that the people looked upon it as a miracle. Every day the guests came in crowds to Spychow. Then there followed a time of calmness. Zbyszko sometimes entered the vault, and sometimes went with his bow into the forest, although he did not shoot but merely walked absent-mindedly about. One evening he entered the chamber where the girls were sitting with Macko and Hlawa.

"Listen!" he said suddenly. "No one can live for ever upon sorrow. It is better that you return to Bogdaniec and Zgorzelice than sit here in grief."

There was silence, for all guessed that he had something of importance on his mind.

"If it is better for us," said Macko at length, "it is better for you also."

"No!" said Zbyszko, shaking his head. "I too will return to Bogdaniec, if God grant it; but now I must go elsewhere. . . . You know I have made a vow."

"So that is the reason! But Danusia is no more, and your vows are no more; her death has released you from them."

"My death would release me, but not hers. I vowed before God and on my chivalrous honour. What, then, would you have me do? On my chivalrous honour!"

Macko, whose life was guided by few laws except those of God and the Church, was strangely stirred whenever any question of knightly honour arose.

"I do not ask you not to keep your oath," he said.

"What else do you mean, then?"

"You are young, and have time enough for everything. Come with us now; rest for a little and get rid of your grief and pain; then you may go where you will."

"I will confess frankly," said Zbyszko, "that I eat and drink and talk like everyone, and I ride wherever it may be necessary. But within me, I say, there is nothing but sorrow and pain, and bitter tears that rise constantly to my eyes!"

"Among strangers you will be still worse."

"No. In Bogdaniec I should lose all my force. It is war that I need: on the battlefield it is easier to forget. Only when I am able to tell that sainted soul that I have accomplished all I promised—only then, I feel, will she release me. You could not keep me in Bogdaniec even with a halter!"

Again there was a long silence, which was broken by Jagienka.

"If in Bogdaniec he would lose all his vigour, it is better that he should go," she said. "But Zbyszko," she went on, "swear that if God preserves your life you will not remain in Spychow, but will come back to us."

"Why should I not come back! Assuredly I will not pass Spychow by, yet I will not remain here."

"For," she continued hesitatingly, in a lower tone, "if you are concerned about the coffin, we will carry it for you to Krzesnia."

"Jagienka!" exclaimed Zbyszko. And in the first shock of his emotion and gratitude he knelt at her feet.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

MACKO wished to accompany Zbyszko to the army of Prince Witold, but to this proposal the young knight would not even listen. He insisted upon going alone, without any retinue or waggons, and resolved to take with him only three mounted grooms, one to carry provisions, another armour and clothing, and the third bearskins on which to sleep. In vain Jagienka and Macko implored him to take at least Hlawa, as a groom of proved fidelity and strength. But he was obstinate and would not consent, saying that he wished to forget the pain that was devouring him, and that the presence of Hlawa would but remind him of all that was already past.

Before his departure, however, important deliberations took place as to what was to be done with Spychow. Macko advised that the estate should be sold. He said that it was an unlucky place, which brought no one anything but disaster and distress. He knew that in Spychow there was wealth of every kind—money, horses, armour, clothing, furs and skins, costly furniture and herds, and in his heart he was anxious to stock Bogdaniec with these riches, for that estate was more loved by him than any other. But although they talked long over the project Zbyszko would by no means agree to the sale.

"How can I sell Jurand's bones!" he said. "Am I thus to repay him for all the benefits he heaped upon me?"

"We promised you that we would take Danusia's coffin with us," answered Macko; "we can take Jurand's body also."

"But here he is with his ancestors, and in Krzesnia he will be lonely without them. If you take Danusia alone, then he will lie here, far from his child; if you take him also, then his forefathers will be left here alone."

"You forget that Jurand sees them all in Paradise every day; for Father Kaleb says he is in Paradise."

"His soul is indeed in Paradise," said Father Kaleb, who took the part of Zbyszko, "but his body must remain on earth until the Day of Judgment."

"Assuredly," said Macko, after meditating a little, "Jurand cannot see those who are yet mortal, but for that there is no help."

"What have we to do with the decrees of Heaven?" answered Zbyszko. "God will not permit a stranger to dwell here, over their sacred dust. I prefer to leave them both here and not sell Spychow, even should I be offered a principality for it."

On hearing him speak thus, Macko saw that there was nothing more to be said, for he knew his nephew's stubborn nature, which, however, he admired in his heart almost as much as his other qualities.

"It is true," he said presently, "that to me this is against the grain; nevertheless he is right." And he was troubled, not knowing what was to be done.

Then Jagienka, who had hitherto been silent, spoke.

"What if we were to find some honest man who would manage Spychow, or else take it to cultivate?" she said. "It would be better to let it for cultivation, for then there would be no trouble and the money would be sure. Perhaps Tolima——. But he is old and knows more of war than of husbandry; but if not he, then perhaps Father Kaleb would be willing."

"Beloved Panienka!" answered Father Kaleb. "Both Tolima and myself are indeed thinking of the earth; but we think of that which is soon to cover us, and not of that beneath our feet. Is it not so?" he asked, turning towards Tolima.

Tolima encircled his ear with his hand and asked what had been said. When the priest's words had been repeated to him in a louder voice he answered:

"It is true. For husbandry I am useless. An axe cuts deeper than a plough! . . . Yet, even now, I would fain avenge the Pan and his child!" . . . And he stretched out his lean, sinewy hands, his fingers crooked like the claws of a bird of prey. Then, turning his grey, wolf-like head towards Macko and Zbyszko, he said: "Take me with you against the Germans! Let that be my service!"

Old Tolima was right, for although he had increased Jurand's wealth in no small measure, it had been by means of war and booty, and not by husbandry. Jagienka had been pondering while the priest and the old warrior had been speaking.

"A young and fearless man would be useful here," she said, "for the German frontier is near. Such a man, I mean, as would not hide himself from the Germans, but would seek them out. I think, then, that for this Hlawa, for example, would be a fit man——"

"Only see how she decides everything!" exclaimed Macko who, in spite of all his love for Jagienka, could not conceive how in such matters a woman should venture to proffer an opinion, and especially a bareheaded maid.

But the Bohemian rose from the bench on which he sat and said:

"Heaven knows how glad I should be to go to war along with Pan Zbyszko! We have already husked a few Germans together, and we should have a chance of doing so again. But if I am to stay behind, then I would stay here. Tolima is my friend and knows me. The German frontier is near, but what of that? So much the better! We shall see who will be tired of the neighbourhood first! Should I fear them, then let them fear me! Heaven forbid, too, that I should injure your worships in the management and grasp all for my own profit! As to that the Panienska will speak, for she knows I would rather die a hundred times than look at her with dishonest eyes. As to husbandry, I know it so far as I have seen it at Zgorzelice, but I think that this household will have to be maintained with sword and axe rather than with the plough. All this is to my liking, only—to remain here——"

"What then?" asked Zbyszko. "Why do you hesitate?"

Hlawa was greatly confused and stammered as he continued:

"Well—when the Panienska goes away, then—then everyone will go with her. To wage war is well—to manage the estate, well also. But—to be here alone, without anyone to help . . . I should feel fearfully lonely here—without the Panienska and without . . . I mean to say that—that the Panienska, when she was travelling about the world, was not alone, and——. So, if I had no one here beside me—then, I do not know!"

"Of what is the fellow talking?" asked Macko.

"You are clever enough, and yet you have not been able to understand this," answered Jagienka.

"What, then, does it mean?"

But instead of answering she addressed the groom:

"And if Anulka, the daughter of Sieciech, were to stay here with you, would you endure it?"

The Bohemian fell at her feet with such precipitation that the dust rose in a cloud from the floor.

"If it were Hell itself I would endure it with her!" he exclaimed, kissing her feet.

Zbyszko, hearing these words, looked at Hlawa with astonishment, for hitherto he had neither known nor guessed anything. As for Macko, he pondered in his soul how great is the importance of women in all human affairs, and how everything may either thrive or fail because of them.

"Thanks be to God," he muttered, "that I no longer care for them!"

"Now," said Jagienka once more to Hlawa, "we have only to learn whether Anulka also will endure it." And she called Sieciech's daughter.

Anulka entered, apparently knowing or guessing the purport of the summons. Her eyes were covered with her hand, and her head was bent so that only the parting of her fair hair was seen, glistening still brighter in the descending sunbeams. She stopped for a moment close to the door; then rushing towards Jagienka, she fell on her knees before her and hid her face in the folds of the Panienska's skirt.

And Hlawa, kneeling at her side, said:

"Bless us, Panienska!"

CHAPTER LXXIV.

NEXT day came the moment for Zbyszko's departure. He was mounted on a tall horse, while those he was to leave behind gathered round about him. Jagienka stood close to his stirrup, silently raising her sorrowful blue eyes towards him from time to time, as if to sate her sight with looking at him before the final leave-taking. At his other stirrup stood Macko and Father Kaleb, and, close by, Hlawa with Anulka. Zbyszko turned his head now to one side, now to the other, exchanging with them such short expressions as are usual before a long journey: "Remain in good health!" "May God guide you!" "It is now time!" "Ah, yes; it is time!"

He had already taken leave of all of them, including Jagienka, whose feet he had embraced while again thanking her for all her goodness to him. But now, as he looked down at her from his high knightly saddle, he felt that he must say one more kind word to her, for her eyes were turned upon him and her upturned face said so distinctly: "Come back again!" that his heart swelled with gratitude. And as if in answer to her silent eloquence, he said:

"Jagienka, you are like my own sister! Do you know it? . . . I can say no more!"

"I know. May God repay you!"

"And you will remember my uncle?"

"And you—you will not forget him?"

"Assuredly! I will come back—if I do not perish."

"You must not perish!"

Once before, in Plock, when he spoke of his future expedition, she had said in similar fashion: "You must not perish!" But now her words seemed to come from the depths of her soul, and it was, perhaps, to hide her tears that she bowed her head as she uttered them, so that for a moment her forehead touched Zbyszko's knees.

Meanwhile the mounted grooms were at the gate holding the pack-horses. They were ready for the journey and began singing:

“The ring, the ring, the golden ring
Shall not be lost—be not afraid!
The raven from the field shall bring
The ring of gold—so sweet a thing!—
Unto the maid—unto the maid!”

“Farewell!” exclaimed Zbyszko.

“Farewell!”

“May God keep you! And the Holy Virgin!”

The hoofs rattled over the wooden drawbridge; one of the horses gave a long-drawn neigh, and the others snorted loudly as the cavalcade started.

Jagienka, Macko, the priest, Tolima, Hlawa with his bride, and the servants remaining in Spychow went out on the bridge and gazed after those who had gone. For a long time Father Kaleb continued making the sign of the cross after them, and when at length they had disappeared behind a tall clump of alder trees, he turned and said:

“Under this sign no mishap will befall them.”

“Surely!” answered Macko. “But it is also a good omen that the horses snorted so loudly.”

Macko and Jagienka did not remain long in Spychow. In two weeks the old knight, having settled all the affairs of the estate with Hlawa, who had taken it to farm, set out for Bogdaniec at the head of a long team of waggons, accompanied by Jagienka and surrounded by an armed retinue. Neither Father Kaleb nor old Tolima greatly enjoyed the sight of the waggons, for, to tell the truth, Macko had somewhat despoiled Spychow. Still, as Zbyszko had left the management of everything to Macko, no one dared oppose him. He would, indeed, have taken even more had it not been for the restraint of Jagienka, whom he obeyed in everything, although he was constantly quarrelling with her and deriding her “woman’s understanding.”

But they did not carry Danusia’s body with them, because Spychow had not been sold, and Zbyszko preferred that she should rest with her forefathers. They carried, however, much money and wealth of other kinds,

most of which had been taken as booty from the Germans in many battles fought with them by Jurand. Therefore Macko, as he looked at the well-laden waggons covered with rushes, felt his soul stir with joy at the thought that with their contents he would now be able to stock and improve Bogdaniec. Yet his joy was poisoned by the fear that Zbyszko might be slain; nevertheless, knowing the youth's dexterity as a knight, he did not lose hope that he would yet return in safety, and to that happy moment he looked forward with delight.

"It may be," he said to himself, "that God has ordered that Zbyszko, after having obtained Sypchow first, shall get Moczydoly afterwards, with all that the abbot left. Let him only come back in safety, and I will build him a worthy castle in Bogdaniec. Then we shall see!"

Here he recollected that Cztan of Rogow and Wilk of Brzozowa would not be likely to meet him in too friendly fashion, and that it might even be necessary to fight them. But for this he cared little, as an old war-horse cares little when he may be required to enter the battle. His health was now restored, and he felt strength in his bones, so that he felt confident of vanquishing these blusterers who, although dangerous enemies, possessed no chivalrous training. It is true that not long before he had spoken otherwise of them to Zbyszko, but he had done so only that his nephew might be disposed to return.

"Ha! I am a pike and they are but gudgeons!" thought he. "They had best not come within reach of my jaws!"

There was, however, another matter about which he was anxious. When Zbyszko would return God only knew, and in any case he apparently looked upon Jagienka merely as a sister. What if she too regarded him as a brother, and would not care to wait for his uncertain return?

"Listen, Jagienka!" he said turning towards her. "I am not speaking of Cztan or Wilk, for they are coarse fellows and quite unworthy of you. You are now a Court maid, and you are ripe enough for marriage. Before he died your blessed father told me that you felt God's will, and that was several years ago. . . . I do not know! They say that when a maiden feels her garland irksome to her, she may herself seek out some one to

take it from her head. . . . Of course I mean neither Cztan nor Wilk——. But, what do you think?"

"What is it you mean?"

"Will you never marry anyone?"

"I? . . . I will take a nun's veil."

"Do not talk foolishly! If Zbyszko should come back?"

But she shook her head and said:

"I would take the veil."

"But if he should love you?—if he should entreat you very much?"

Jagienka turned her blushing face towards the field, but the wind, which just then blew from that direction, brought Macko the answer she had uttered in a low voice:

"Then I would not take it!"

PART X.

CHAPTER LXXV.

MACKO and Jagienka remained in Plock for some time in order to make the arrangements necessary in connection with the abbot's testament and heritage. Then, having obtained possession of the proper documents, they set out again, and did not take much rest by the way. The road was now easy and safe, for the summer heat had dried up the swamps and narrowed the rivers. The country through which they were travelling was inhabited by people of kindred blood and of hospitable manners. Nevertheless the cautious Macko dispatched a groom from Sieradz to Zgorzelice to announce their arrival. It was not long before they were met half-way by Jasko, Jagienka's brother, who had hastened towards them with an armed retinue in order to escort them home.

There was no lack of joyous greetings and exclamations at their meeting. Jasko and his sister still resembled each other like two drops of water, but now he had outstripped her in growth. He was a sturdy youth, bright and merry like his father, Zych, from whom he had inherited his disposition for incessant singing, and was lively as a spark. He was already conscious of his years and strength, and believed himself to be a grown man, for he was in the habit of commanding his grooms as if he were indeed a man, while they executed all his orders instantly, evidently fearing his dignity and authority.

Both Macko and Jagienka were struck with admiration at the sight of him, while he, on beholding the beauty and courtly manners of his sister, whom he had not seen for a long time, was filled with wonder and joy.

Jasko told them that he had already made preparations to go in search of her, and it might well have happened that they had not found him at home, for he felt he must needs see the world and mix with different sorts of people in order to acquire chivalrous training, and find, from time to time, occasion to fight against knights-errant.

"To know the world and the customs of nations is a good thing," said Macko to the youth, "for such knowledge teaches one how to act in divers circumstances, and what speech one ought to hold; moreover, it fortifies one's natural understanding. But as for fighting, it is better that I should tell you that you are yet too young for such work, rather than that you should hear it from some strange knight, who, as he told it you, would not fail to laugh at you."

"After he had laughed he would weep," answered Jasko, "or if not he, then his wife and children." And he looked before him with terrible ferocity, as if to warn all the knights in the world to prepare for death.

"And Cztan and Wilk," asked the old knight, "have they left you unmolested here? They were very fond of Jagienka."

"Ha! Wilk was slain in Silesia. He tried to seize a German castle there, and he did seize it; but they crushed him down with a stone block thrown from off the walls, so that two days later he breathed his last."

"I am sorry for him," said Macko. "His father also used to go against the Germans in Silesia who oppress our people there, and he took much booty from them. . . . There is nothing so evil as storming castles, for in that business neither armour nor knightly training is of any avail. God grant that Prince Witold do not take to storming castles, but that he crush the Knights of the Cross in the open field! And Cztan—what has become of him?"

Here Jasko began to laugh.

"Cztan has married!" he exclaimed. "He took a peasant's daughter at Wysoki Brzeg celebrated for her beauty. Ha-ha! She is not only a pretty maid, but a knowing one as well, for although many a man prefers to give way to Cztan, she beats him over his shaggy snout, and leads him about like a bear on a chain with a ring through its nostrils."

On hearing this the old knight grew very merry.

"You see, Jagienka! The women are all the same, and you will be no different! . . . But, thank God that there was no trouble with these two blusterers, for, to tell the truth, I am astonished that they did not vent their wrath upon Bogdaniec."

"Cztan would have done so, but Wilk, who was shrewder, would not let him. He came to us in Zgorzelice to ask what had become of Jagienka. I said that she had gone because of the abbot's heritage, and he asked, 'Why then did not Macko tell me about it?' Then I said to him, 'Why should he? Is Jagienka yours, that they should ask your permission?' After thinking for a while, 'Faith,' said he, 'she is not mine.' And as he is sharp-witted he evidently guessed at once that he would be the more likely to conciliate you and us if he protected Bogdaniec from Cztan. And, indeed, they fought with each other at Lawica, near Piask, and hacked each other badly; but afterwards they were seen drinking together like fishes, as was their custom always."

"God bless Wilk's soul!" exclaimed Macko, with a deep sigh of relief, as he thought that he would find Bogdaniec unharmed except for the damage caused by neglect during his long absence.

In reality, he did not find such damage as he had expected. On the contrary, his herds had even increased—from the small stock of mares there were already several two-year-old colts, some of them by Frisian battle stallions, of extraordinary height and strength. The only loss was that of some captives who had escaped, but these were not numerous, for they could take refuge only in Silesia, and there the German robber-knights treated prisoners worse than did the Polish nobility. The big, old house, however, was considerably decayed. The floors were burst open, the walls and ceilings were warped, and the great beams of larch, cut two hundred years before or more, had begun to rot. During the abundant summer showers the rain had flowed into all the chambers, which had once swarmed with the Gradys of Bogdaniec. The roof was full of holes, and was covered with tufts of green and rufous moss. The whole building seemed to stoop and lean over, reminding one of a widespreading but decaying mushroom.

"Had it been properly seen to it might still have lasted, for it is not long since the decay began," said Macko to Kondrat, the old field-keeper, who had managed the estate while Macko and Zbyszko were absent. "As for me," he continued presently, "I would live here, as it is, until my death, but Zbyszko thinks of a castle."

"Oh, by Heaven! A castle?"

"Well! And what then?"

It was a favourite idea of the old man himself to build a castle for Zbyszko and his future children. He knew that a nobleman who lives, not in a common manor, but behind a moat and palisade, and has a tower from which his guards can watch over the neighbourhood, is at once considered a personage of importance by his neighbours, and may the more easily obtain some high office. For himself, Macko now desired little, but for Zbyszko and his sons, he would not be content with small things, the more so as their estates had now increased so considerably.

"May he yet take Jagienka," he said to himself, "and with her Moczydoly and the abbot's heritage. Then there will be no one in the neighbourhood to equal us—which God grant!"

But all this depended upon Zbyszko's return, and that was an uncertain matter, the direction of which lay in the hand of Heaven. For this reason Macko said to himself that it were well to be on the best terms possible with God; he must not merely take care not to incur His displeasure, but must do everything in his power to obtain His favour. He therefore grudged the church in Krzesnia neither wax, nor corn, nor game. One evening he came to Zgorzelice and said to Jagienka:

"To-morrow I set out for Krakow, to the tomb of our holy Queen Jadwiga."

Jagienka sprang up from the bench on which she sat.

"Have you received bad news?" she asked in terror.

"There is no news, for there could be none yet. But you remember how, when I was sick—when you went with Zbyszko to hunt the beavers—I made a vow that if God restored my health I would go to the Queen's tomb. All then praised my resolve. To be sure there are many in God's holy retinue; still, a common saint is by no means equal to our holy Queen, whom I am desirous not to offend, because I am anxious concerning Zbyszko."

"Indeed, that is true," said Jagienka. "Yet, seeing you have only just returned from such terrible wanderings——"

"What of that! I would rather be rid of all at once, and afterwards sit quietly at home until Zbyszko's return. If only our Queen will intercede with the Lord Jesus in his behalf, then even ten Germans, well armed and mounted, will not be able to cope with him. . . . Then, too, I will build the castle with greater hope. . . ."

"Well, your bones are still sound, I see!"

"To be sure, I am yet green! . . . Then there is something else I have to say. Let Jasko, who is eager to wander, come with me. I am experienced, and will know how to restrain him. And should any adventure befall us—seeing that the lad's hands are itching—then you know I am no novice at fighting, on horseback or on foot, with sword or with axe."

"I know. There is no one who will protect him better than you."

"Still, I think there will be no occasion for fighting. As long as the Queen lived there were in Krakow plenty of foreign knights, eager to see her beauty; but now they prefer to go to Marienburg, for there the wine-casks are fatter."

"Yes, but there is now a new Queen."

But Macko made a wry face, and waved his hand.

"I have seen her!" he exclaimed. "I will say no more—you understand!"

He paused for a few moments, and then added:

"In three weeks or four we shall be back."

And it happened as Macko wished. He made Jasko swear by his honour and by the head of Saint George that he would not insist upon further wanderings, and then set out.

They reached Krakow without adventure, for the country was quiet, the Germanised frontier dukes and the German robber-knights being restrained from outrage by fear of the Polish power and the inflexible valour of the Polish knights. When Macko had performed his vows, he and Jasko were introduced to the royal Court by the good offices of Powala of Taczew and Duke Jamont. Macko had expected that the chief courtiers and officers of the royal household would be eager to ask him ques-

tions concerning the Knights of the Cross, as one who had observed them closely and knew them thoroughly. But after having talked with the Chancellor and the Sword-bearer of Krakow he perceived with astonishment that they knew about the Knights of the Cross not less, but even more, than he himself. They knew everything—even to the most minute particulars—that was going on in Marienburg, and even at the most remote castles of the Order as well. They knew what troops there were, the number of soldiers in the different fortresses, the time requisite for mustering them, and the plans of the Knights in the event of a war. They were even well informed concerning all the komthurs, and knew of each one whether he was rash and headstrong or wary and deliberate. And of everything they kept a record, as if they expected the war to break out on the morrow.

In his heart the old knight was greatly pleased to learn all this, for he saw that they were preparing with greater deliberation and wisdom, as well as more extensively, in Krakow than in Marienburg. "The Lord Jesus," he said to himself, "has given us valour at least equal to theirs, or even greater, but assuredly much more wisdom and forethought!" And it was indeed so. He soon learned whence the intelligence came: it was furnished by the inhabitants of Prussia themselves—men of all conditions, Germans as well as Poles. The Order contrived to excite such hatred against its rule that the whole people of Prussia looked for the arrival of Jagiello's troops as eagerly as for salvation.

Macko recalled some words uttered by Zyndram of Maszkow in Marienburg, and as he thought of them he kept repeating to himself:

"That fellow has indeed a head! For size 'tis like a pail!"

And he fixed every word of Zyndram's well in his mind. On one occasion he even borrowed that knight's wisdom, for it happened one day that young Jasko began questioning him about the Knights of the Cross and their power.

"The rogues are strong," answered Macko. "But, tell me: Will not a knight—even the strongest—fall from his saddle if his saddle-girth and stirrups are cut?"

"He will fall, as surely as I am standing here!" replied the youth.

“Well—look you!” exclaimed Macko in a voice of thunder; “do not you forget it!”

“Why so?”

“Because the Order is such a knight!”

Then after a time he added:

“It is not from every mouth that you will hear that—be sure!”

Seeing that the young knight was unable fully to comprehend the meaning of the saying, he proceeded to explain the matter more clearly. But he omitted to add that he himself had not invented the comparison, and that it had been conceived—every word of it—within the cunning brain of Zyndram of Maszkow.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THEY did not remain long in Krakow. Indeed, their stay would have been still shorter but for the entreaties of Jasko, who wished to see more of the town and its inhabitants, for to him everything seemed like some wonderful dream. The old knight, however, was in great haste to return home because of the harvest, and he did not pay so much heed to the lad's wishes as he might otherwise have done, so that the feast of the Assumption found them both back—Macko in Bogdaniec, and Jasko in Zgorzelice with his sister.

Their lives now went on quietly from day to day, filled with household work and the ordinary cares of rural life. At Zgorzelice—and particularly on Jagienka's estate of Moczydoly, the land of which lay low—the harvest was excellent; but at Bogdaniec, as the season had been dry, the crops were meagre, and the gathering of them did not require much labour. The whole area of cultivated soil was not great, for the estate was almost covered with pine forests, and in consequence of the long absence of the Pans even those parts which had already been cleared and prepared for tillage by the abbot had again become overgrown with wood owing to the insufficiency of hands.

Old Macko, although sensitive to every loss, did not take this too much to heart, for he knew that with money it would be an easy matter to put everything in order, provided there was some one who would inherit the result of the labour. It was, however, his uncertainty as to this that poisoned his life and work. It was not that he lost his energy, for he used to rise before day-break to supervise the work in field and forest. He had even chosen a site for the castle and had begun the preparation of the building materials. But many a time, after a scorching day, when the sun had disappeared in the golden, fiery glow of the twilight, his mind was filled

with a terrible depression and uneasiness such as he had never felt before.

"Here am I, toiling and moiling," he would say to himself, "and perhaps the lad is lying far away on some field, pierced with a spear, with only the wolves to toll the requiem over him with their teeth!"

At the thought his heart would groan with love and fear. Then he would listen eagerly for the tramp of the horse's hoofs which announced the coming of Jagienka, for in her presence he always feigned to be full of hope, and indeed when she was by his soul really did recover somewhat from its affliction.

She came every day, usually towards evening, a cross-bow at her saddle and in her hand a spear in case of adventure on her way home. Her hope that she would one day find that Zbyszko had arrived unexpectedly was as yet hardly likely to be realised, for Macko himself did not venture to look for his return within a year or even eighteen months from his setting out. Yet the maid seemed secretly to cherish that hope, for she came, not, as formerly, in a rough woolly sheepskin jacket covering a shirt carelessly drawn about her neck with a cord, and with leaves in her dishevelled locks, but with her hair carefully braided and her bosom discreetly covered with brightly dyed Sieradz cloth. Macko used to go out to meet her, and her first question, uttered as if from force of habit, was always: "Well, what is the news?" and his answer was always: "Nothing!" Then he would lead her into the chamber, and there, by the fireside, they talked of Zbyszko, Lithuania, the Knights of the Cross and the war—always of the same things—and not only was neither of them ever tired of these talks, but neither ever seemed to have enough.

Thus whole months went past. Sometimes Macko came to see Jagienka though less frequently than she to see him. Sometimes, too, when there had been robbers in the neighbourhood, or when there was danger to be apprehended from bears, Macko accompanied her home. When well armed the old knight, who was still unusually strong, had but little fear of wild beasts of any kind; indeed, he was more dangerous to them than they to him. At such times, as they rode along side by side, threatening sounds came towards them from the recesses of the pine forests. But they forgot everything that was happening about them and talked only of Zbyszko—where

he was, what he was doing, whether he had already slain as many Knights of the Cross as he had vowed to Danusia, and whether he would soon return. Jagienka would ask the same questions which she had already asked nearly a hundred times, and Macko would answer them with as much care and consideration as if he had heard them for the first time.

"You think, then," she would say, "that a battle in the field is not so dangerous for a knight as the storming of castles?"

"Look you what happened to Wilk!" was the reply. "No armour can protect against a block of stone thrown down from the walls, but on the field, if only he has proper training, a knight may resist even ten men."

"And Zbyszko—is his armour good?"

"He has many good suits, but the best is that which was taken from the Frisians, for it was wrought in Milan. A year ago it was a little too large for him, but now it is just his proper size."

"But against such armour surely no weapon can avail?"

"What a human hand has made a human hand may destroy. Against Milanese armour, a Milanese sword—or the arrows of the English."

"The arrows of the English?" asked Jagienka in alarm.

"Have I not told you? There are no better bowmen in the world than they—except, perhaps, the forest Mazovians, but they have not such excellent weapons. An English crossbow will pierce the best armour from a distance of a hundred paces. I have seen them do so at Wilno. An English Bowman will never miss, and there are many among them who will bring a hawk on the wing dead to the ground."

"Ah, the sons of the heathen! How then were you able to fight with them?"

"There was no other means but to rush upon them instantly and fight them at close quarters. They, the hounds, are also skilful with the battle-axe; nevertheless, hand to hand, our people are able to cope with them."

"As God's hand guarded you, so it will guard Zbyszko!"

"Often I think likewise, for since He has created us and settled us in Bogdaniec, He will surely see that our house does not perish. However, that is God's business, and assuredly it is no easy matter to look after the whole world and forget nothing. Still, one can remind him of

one's self, as far as may be, by not using his holy Church parsimoniously—and then God's head is not a human one!"

Many a time they talked together thus, cheering and filling each other with hope. Yet meanwhile the days, weeks, and months went past. In the autumn Macko had a quarrel with old Wilk of Brzozowa. There had been an ancient boundary dispute between the Wilks and the abbot concerning some forest land which the latter, when holding Bogdaniec in mortgage, had cleared of trees and enclosed. Once the abbot had even challenged both the Wilks to fight with spears or swords, but they would not consent to fight against a priest, while in the Court they knew that they would gain nothing. Now old Wilk laid claim to the land; but Macko, who was covetous of nothing in the world so much as land, following the first impulse of his nature, and at the same time influenced by the knowledge that fresh soil is the most favourable for barley, would not even think of giving it up. They would, therefore, most certainly have fought the matter out in the Court of justice, had they not happened to meet each other one day in the house of the parson of Krzesnia. A vehement dispute took place, and in the end old Wilk exclaimed angrily:

"Rather than have men judge us I will commit my cause to God, and He will avenge my wrong upon your house!"

Macko felt that he had been headstrong. He softened and, growing pale, was silent for a time.

"Listen," he said at length to his quarrelsome neighbour, "it was not I who began the quarrel, but the abbot. God knows which of you was in the right, but if you would curse Zbyszko then take the land, and let him have health and happiness, for I give it to you freely."

And he stretched out his hand towards Wilk who, having known him long, was greatly astonished. He had no suspicion of the great love for his nephew that was concealed in Macko's seemingly hard heart, or of the uneasiness concerning his fate that filled his mind. So for a long time he could not utter a word, but at length, when the parson of Krzesnia, overjoyed at the turn the affair had taken, made the sign of the cross over them, he said:

"If so, then it is a different matter. I was not thinking of profit—for I am old and I have no one to whom

to leave the estate—but of right. Whosoever deals with me kindly, to him will I give even of my own property. And as for your nephew, may Heaven bless him, and may you never have to weep for him in your old age, as I do for my only son!”

Thereupon they embraced each other, and then contended together for a long time as to who should take the land. At length Macko allowed himself to be persuaded to retain it, which he was the more ready to do as Wilk was indeed alone in the world and had really no one to whom he could leave the estate.

Macko invited the old man to Bogdaniec, and there he entertained him copiously with food and drink, for now his heart was filled with joy. He was gladdened by the thought that he would have a fine crop of barley from the land, and that he had turned away from Zbyszko the displeasure of Heaven.

“Let him only come back,” said he to himself, “then he will have no lack of land and wealth!”

Jagienka was no less satisfied that the dispute had ended harmoniously.

“Now,” said she, having listened to all that had taken place, “if our merciful Lord Jesus would show that he loves peace rather than strife, then He must bring Zbyszko back to you safe and sound.”

Macko’s face brightened as if a sunbeam had fallen upon it.

“I think so also,” he said. “God is almighty, it is true, but one must take precautions even with the powers of Heaven; one must be wary——”

“You have never been lacking in prudence,” said the girl, raising her eyes.

For a time she seemed to be meditating about something, and presently she said again:

“But you do love your Zbyszko, do you not—eh?”

“Who would not love him,” answered the old knight. “And you?—Do you dislike him?”

Jagienka did not say anything in reply at once. But as she sat on the bench by Macko’s side she moved still more closely to him and, turning away her head, pushed him gently with her elbow.

“Let me be!” she said. “What have I done that you should tease me so?”

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE war between the Knights of the Cross and Prince Witold on account of Samogitia excited so much interest among the people that all were anxious to have news concerning its progress. Some were confident that King Jagiello would come to the aid of his uncle's son, and that a great expedition against the Order was close at hand. The knighthood were eagerly bent upon it, and in all the manors of the landowners it was commonly said that a considerable number of the Pans of Krakow who sat in the King's Council were inclined in favour of the war, believing that it was necessary to finish once and for all with enemies who were never satisfied with their own, but were always thinking of robbing the property of their neighbour, even when they stood in awe of their neighbour's power. But Macko, who was a shrewd man and had seen much and understood much, did not believe in the imminence of such a war, and he often delivered himself on the subject to young Jasko of Zgorzelice and his other neighbours whom he used to meet in Krzesnia.

"As long as the Grand Master Konrad is alive," he said, "nothing will come of it, for he is wiser than the others. He knows it would be no common war but a slaughter—'your death or mine!' And he will not permit it, for he knows the King's power."

"Yes, but if the King should declare war first?" said one of the listeners.

But Macko tossed his head.

"Look you!" he said. "I have seen everything close at hand, and know what I am speaking of. . . . Were he a king of our old blood—of those who were Christian since times unknown—then, perhaps, he might attack the Germans first. But our Wladyslaw Jagiello—I do not wish to slight his honour, for he is a worthy

ruler, and may God preserve him in good health!—I say, before we elected him to be our King, Jagiello was a Grand Duke of Lithuania and a heathen; it is not long since he received baptism, and the Germans still bark throughout the world saying that he is yet a heathen in his soul. Therefore it were scarcely seemly for him to declare war for the purpose of shedding Christian blood. It is for this reason that he does not stir to help Witold, although his hands are itching to do so, for well I know that he hates the Knights of the Cross like leprosy.”

With such discourses Macko gained for himself the reputation of a clever man of affairs who was able to expound any matter and set it out clearly as if on a table. At Krzesnia, every Sunday after mass, the people used to surround him in a circle to hear what he had to say. It was customary, too, for any neighbour who had received any news to come to Bogdaniec in order that the old knight might explain such things as the head of an ordinary gentleman was unable to understand. Macko received every one hospitably, and when the visitor, having heard all he had to say, was about to take his departure, he never omitted to dismiss him with the words.

“You wonder at my wit, I see, but when Zbyszko comes back—which God grant!—then you will wonder still more. So shrewd and sharp-witted is he, the knave, he might sit in the King’s Council!”

And by dint of trying to make others believe this, he finished by persuading himself, as well as Jagienka, that it was true, for to both of them Zbyszko appeared from afar like some prince in a fairy tale.

When spring approached they were scarcely able to sit quietly at home any longer. The swallows and the storks returned, the landrails began to creak in the meadows, and the quails to pipe in the green winter corn; flights of cranes and teal also appeared—only Zbyszko did not return. But while the birds came in flocks from the south, news of the war was brought on the wings of the wind from the north. There was talk of battles and encounters in which the indefatigable Witold was now victorious, now repulsed; there was talk of great disasters suffered by the Germans through cold and disease. Then at length there resounded throughout

the land like thunder the joyful tidings that the valorous son of Kiejstut had taken Nowe Kowno, otherwise called Gotteswerder, and demolished it, leaving neither stone nor rafter untouched. As soon as he heard the news, Macko mounted a horse and rode off instantly to Zgorzelice.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "I know that country, for we beat them sound there—the Knights of the Cross—with Zbyszko and Skirwoillo. It was there, too, that we took honest de Lorche. Assuredly God has not vouchsafed the Germans good fortune, for it was a castle not easy to be taken."

Before Macko's arrival, however, Jagienka had already heard the news of Nowe Kowno's demolition. She had heard something else besides, namely, that Witold had begun negotiations for peace. This intelligence interested her even more than the first, for if peace were to be concluded Zbyszko, provided he were still alive, would be obliged to return home.

She therefore asked the old knight whether peace was probable, and after considering for a time he replied thus:

"With Witold all things are possible, for he is a man different from others, and surely the most crafty of all Christian rulers. When he desires to extend his dominions towards Russia, he makes peace with the Germans; but when he has accomplished there what he wished to accomplish, then he grasps the Germans by the hair. They can avail nothing either against him or against unhappy Samogitia. At one time he takes it from them, at another he gives it up—and not only gives it up, but even himself helps them to oppress it. There are men among us, and in Lithuania also, who take it ill that he thus plays wanton tricks with the blood of that unhappy race. And to say truth, I should hold it for ignominy were it any one but Witold. For sometimes I think, 'Perhaps he is wiser than I, and knows what he is about.' And indeed I was told by Skirwoillo himself that Witold had made that country into an ulcer, constantly bleeding in the body of the Order, so that it may never recover its health. Mothers will always beget children in Samogitia, and blood must not be spared, if only it be not shed in vain."

"I hope only that Zbyszko will return!" sighed Jagienka.

"May God grant it! And may your words, maid, be of good omen!"

Several months passed, and at length the news arrived that peace had really been concluded. The corn turned yellow, pregnant with ears; the fields sown with buckwheat were covered over with red; but still there was no news of Zbyszko.

At length, after the first harvest, Macko could endure it no longer and announced that he would set out for Spychow in order to seek for tidings there, that country being nearer to Lithuania, and at the same time to inspect the Bohemian's management of the estate.

Jagienka insisted upon going with him, but he would not consent to take her, and thus a dispute arose between them which lasted a whole week. But one evening, as they were thus contending together at Zgorzelice, one of the lads from Bogdaniec, barefooted, and without a cap on his yellow head, came rushing like the wind across the yard of the manor where they were sitting on a bench, and exclaimed as he reached them:

"The young Pan has come back!"

Zbyszko had indeed returned, but he was no longer the same. Not only was he thin and emaciated, as if burnt by the hot field wind, but he was also taciturn and indifferent to everything. Hlawka and his wife accompanied him, and the Bohemian spoke for Zbyszko as well as for himself. He said that the expedition of the young knight had apparently been completely successful, for, on his return to Spychow, Zbyszko had laid on the coffins of Danusia and her mother a whole bundle of knights' plumes and peacock and ostrich feathers. He had also brought back horses and armour, of which two of the suits were exceedingly valuable, although terribly hacked with sword and axe.

Macko was burning with curiosity to learn everything from his nephew's own lips, but, when questioned, Zbyszko merely waved his hand and replied with monosyllables. On the third day he became so ill that he was compelled to take to his bed. It appeared that his left side was bruised and that he had two of his ribs broken, which, having been clumsily set, hindered his walking and breathing. He also relapsed into the ailment from which he had formerly suffered after his

adventure with the bison, and the journey from Spychow had completed the breakdown of his strength. In itself all this was not dangerous, for he was young and by nature sturdy as an oak; but for the time he seemed to be mastered by a boundless weariness, as if all the hardships he had endured were at last beginning to shatter his frame. At first Macko thought that after two or three days' rest all this would pass away, but it turned out otherwise. Neither ointments, nor the burnt herbs prescribed by the shepherd of the place, nor the concoctions sent by the parson of Krzesnia and by Jagienka, were of any avail. Zbyszko grew weaker and more weary, while his spirits grew sadder than ever.

"What ails you?" the old knight asked him. "Is there anything you wish?"

"I wish for nothing—I care for nothing," answered Zbyszko.

Thus one day succeeded another, so that at last Jagienka began to think that there must be something more than an ordinary ailment, and that he was probably oppressed by some secret. She therefore essayed to persuade Macko to try once more to ascertain what it might be. To this he agreed without hesitation, but after meditating for a time he said:

"Perhaps he may tell you more readily than me; for, as to his likings, he is indeed fond of you. I have seen that when you are busying yourself in the chamber he is always following you with his eyes."

"Have you, indeed?" said Jagienka.

"If I tell you so, then it must be true. And when you are absent then he is ever and anon looking towards the door. So ask him yourself, do."

Thus it was agreed. But as it happened, Jagienka either had not the courage, or did not know how, to accomplish her mission. When it came to acting she felt that she would be compelled to speak of Danusia and of Zbyszko's love for the dead girl, and she could not bring herself to let the words pass her lips.

"You are wiser," she said to Macko; "you have greater understanding and experience. Do speak to him, for I cannot!"

So, willy-nilly, Macko had to undertake the business, and one morning, when Zbyszko seemed a little livelier than usual, he approached the subject.

"Hlawa has told me," he said, "that you left a fine bundle of peacock plumes in the vault of Spychow?"

Without taking his eyes from the ceiling at which he was gazing as he lay on his back, Zbyszko merely nodded his head in confirmation.

"Ah, the Lord Jesus blessed you with good fortune, for in war knights are by no means so easy to get at as grooms. Of grooms you may slay as many as you like, but for a knight one must often look sharply enough. Did they fall beneath your sword on the field?"

"I challenged several of them to a combat, but once I was surrounded by them in battle," answered the youth lazily.

"And you have brought back plenty of rich booty?"

"Part of it is booty, and part of it Prince Witold bestowed upon me."

"Is he as munificent as ever?"

Again Zbyszko nodded, evidently not desirous of continuing the conversation.

But Macko was not so easily to be rebuffed, and resolved to come to the point without more ado.

"Tell me frankly," said he; "now that you have placed these plumes in the vault you must feel easier in your mind? One is always glad after having accomplished a vow. . . . Were not you glad?"

Zbyszko seemed to drag his sad eyes from the ceiling and turned them upon Macko.

"No," he said, as if somewhat astonished at the question.

"No! Heaven help you! I thought all your troubles would be over as soon as you had gladdened those souls that are gone!"

The young knight closed his eyes for a moment, as if plunged in meditation.

"It seems," he said at length, "that human blood is useless to saved souls."

For several moments Macko was silent.

"Then why did you go to the war?" he asked presently.

"Why!" replied Zbyszko with some animation. "I myself thought that it would be a relief to me! I imagined that I should gladden both Danusia and myself. But as I left the vault where Danusia and her father lie,

I wondered, for I felt as sorrowful as before. Therefore I see that human blood is useless to saved souls!"

"Some one has certainly told you this, for of yourself you would never have thought of it."

"I did think of it myself, just because the world seemed to me no merrier afterwards than before; Father Kaleb merely confirmed me in my belief."

"To slay an enemy in war is by no means a sin; indeed, it is even a praiseworthy thing, the more so if he is an enemy of our nation."

"I do not hold it for a sin, and I do not mourn for them."

"But only for Danusia—still?"

"When I think of her I am still sad for her. But it is God's will! She is better in Heaven's courts, and—I have now grown used to it."

"Then why do you not shake off your sorrow? What is it you wish?"

"I cannot tell!"

"You have no lack of rest, and your malady will soon leave you. Go and take a vapour bath, drink a jug of mead so that you may sweat, and then——"

"Well, and what then?"

"Then you will recover your mirth."

"And whence shall I draw it? I shall not find it in my own heart, and there is no one who can impart it to me."

"Because you are concealing something."

Zbyszko shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no mirth," he said, "but neither have I anything to conceal."

He spoke so sincerely that Macko at once ceased to suspect him of harbouring any secrets. He began stroking his white hair with his great hand, as he was wont to do when pondering any matter deeply, and at length he said:

"Then I will tell you what ails you: You are done with one thing, and the other has not yet begun—do you see what I mean?"

"Not very clearly—but it may be so," answered the young knight. And he stretched out his legs like a man who is growing sleepy.

Macko, however, was now sure that he had guessed the true cause of Zbyszko's dejection. So he was glad

at heart, and ceased to trouble himself. His confidence in his own penetration was now still greater. "No wonder," he said to himself complacently, "that people come to me for counsel!"

On the evening of the day of his conversation with his nephew, Jagienka arrived. Even before she had time to dismount from her horse, he ran out and told her that he now knew what ailed Zbyszko.

The girl instantly slipped down from her saddle.

"Well, what is it?" she asked. "Tell me!"

"It is only you who can find a remedy for him."

"I! What do you mean?"

For answer he took her by the waist and began to whisper something in her ear. But in a moment she started from him as if she had been scalded with hot water, and hid her blushing face between the saddle-cloth and the pillion.

"Go away!" she exclaimed. "I cannot endure you!"

"As I live, I am speaking the truth!" said the old knight, laughing heartily.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

OLD Macko had guessed rightly, but he had not guessed all. One part of Zbyszko's life was, indeed, completely past. Whenever he thought of Danusia he felt sad for her, but he said to himself that she must be happier in the court of Heaven than at that of the Prince. He had now grown accustomed to the thought that she was not of the mortal world, and believed that it could not have been otherwise. Formerly, when in Krakow, he had greatly admired the forms of different saintly virgins on the windows of the churches, cut out in coloured glass, mounted in lead, and transparent in the sun—and now he pictured Danusia to himself as one of these. He saw her in a transparent azure radiance, her face turned half towards him, her eyes looking upward, her hands folded, and her lute hanging by her side, standing among several sainted heavenly musicians who played their instruments before the Holy Virgin and Child. Nothing of the earth now remained in her; to him she had become a spirit so pure and incorporeal that, when he recalled sometimes how she had waited on the Princess at the forest manor, how she had laughed, talked, and sat with other people at table, he was struck with astonishment that it could have been. During the expedition, at Witold's side, when his attention was engrossed by the business of war and battles, he had already ceased to yearn for her as a husband yearns for a wife, and thought of her only as a pious man thinks of his Patron Lady. Thus his love, gradually losing its earthly elements, had changed into a mere memory pure as the blue heavens, into a kind of pious worship.

Had he been a man of weaker body and of deeper thought he would have become a monk, and in the quiet life of the cloister preserved like a sacred relic that divine memory, until the moment when the spirit flies from out

its bodily fetters into boundless space, as a bird escapes from its cage. But he had just begun his twenty-first year, and he could squeeze the sap out of a splinter of raw wood with his hand, and deprive a horse of breath by pressing it between his knees. He was like most of the nobles and wloodykas of his time who, unless they died in childhood or became priests, knowing neither bounds nor measure to their physical impulses, either committed themselves to robbery, profligacy, and drunkenness, or else married early and, at the call to arms, appeared with two dozen or more sons, all of them like boars for strength.

But Zbyszko did not yet know that such was his nature, the more so as he had of late been ill. After a time, however, his badly set ribs healed up, leaving only a slight protuberance on one side which did not incommode him, and was easily hidden, not only by his armour, but also by his ordinary dress. His weakness, too, was passing away. His luxuriant yellow hair, which had been cut in token of mourning for Danusia, again grew down to the middle of his back. His wonderful beauty of former days began to return. A few years ago, when on his way to meet his death by the executioner's hand, he had looked every inch a lad of noble descent. But now he had become still more handsome—a veritable king's son; in shoulders, breast, loins, and arms—a giant, and in features a maid. Life and strength began to bubble within him like boiling water in a pot, and, increased by temperance and long repose, seemed to pass through his bones like a flame. He could not understand it, and thought he was still ill, and as he lay in bed he felt glad that Macko and Jagienka were watching over him, tending him and humouring him in everything. Sometimes it seemed to him that he was as happy as if he were in Heaven; sometimes—and especially when Jagienka was not by—he felt miserable, dejected, and unable to endure it any longer. A long fit of listlessness seized upon him, and he declared to Macko that as soon as he recovered his health he would again go to the world's end against the Germans, against the Tartars, or against any other savage people—if only to get rid of the life which was weighing so terribly upon him. And Macko, instead of opposing him, used to nod his head as if to encourage him; but at the same time he sent

for Jagienka, at whose arrival all Zbyszko's thoughts of fresh war expeditions melted away like snow beneath the warmth of the spring sun.

The girl used to come readily at Macko's request as well as of her own accord, for she loved Zbyszko with her whole heart and soul. During her stay at the courts of the Bishop and the Prince she had seen knights who were equally handsome and famous for their strength and valour—knights who often knelt before her and vowed her faith till death. But Zbyszko was her chosen one; she had loved him with her first love ever since the dawn of her youth, and the misfortunes he had suffered since had only served to increase her love to such an extent that he was to her better and a hundred times dearer not only than all the knights, but also than all the princes in the world. Now, as he was recovering his health, he grew every day more handsome, and her love for him grew almost to distraction, veiling the whole world from her eyes.

But she did not acknowledge this even to herself, and before Zbyszko she was most careful to conceal it, fearful lest he should again disdain her. Even with Macko, in whom she used to be more ready to confide, she was now reserved and taciturn. She might, however, have been betrayed by her solicitude in nursing Zbyszko, but this also she endeavoured to disguise.

"You know," she said to him slyly on one occasion, "I am looking after you a little—out of affection for old Macko; but at once you thought—what was it you thought, eh?"

And, making believe to arrange her hair, she covered her face with her hand, and looked at him intently through her fingers. Taken by surprise at the unexpected question, he blushed like a girl, and it was some moments before he replied confusedly:

"I—I did not know anything. . . . You are different now. . . ."

Both were silent for a time.

"Different!" said the girl at length, in a low soft voice. "Well, assuredly I am. But that I should dislike you completely—well, may God forbid!"

"Then God bless you for it!" answered Zbyszko.

From that time they were glad to be together, though there was a feeling of awkwardness and embarrassment

between them. Sometimes it seemed that when they were talking of one thing they were really thinking of another. Often there were long silences between them. Zbyszko, who constantly kept his bed, followed her with his eyes wherever she moved, just as Macko had said. At certain moments she seemed to him so wonderful that he could not look at her enough. It sometimes happened, too, that their eyes suddenly met, and then the blood would rise to both their faces, while the girl's bosom rose and fell in response to her quicker breathing, and her heart beat tumultuously as if she were about to hear that which would dissolve and melt her soul away. But Zbyszko was silent, for he had completely lost his former audacity in her presence, and feared to startle her with a heedless word. And in spite of all that he saw with his eyes he persuaded himself that she was merely showing him a sisterly affection for the sake of her love for Macko.

Once he ventured to broach the subject to the old knight. He endeavoured to speak with apparent calmness and even indifference, and he did not even observe that as he went on his words gradually took the tone of a complaint, half bitter and half sorrowful. Macko listened patiently to all he had to say. When he had done he rose up and uttered a single word:

"Fool!"

And he left the chamber.

But in the yard he began to rub his hands and strike his thighs with great glee.

"Ah!" he said to himself. "When she might have been got by you cheaply, then you would not even look at her. Well, now that you are such a fool, you can live in fear! I will set about building the castle, and meanwhile you may lick your lips. I will not say a word; I will not take the scales from your eyes, even if you should neigh louder than all the horses in Bogdaniec. When splinters lie on glowing coals, the flame will burst forth sooner or later. But I will not blow on the coals—the rather as I do not hold it to be necessary!"

Not only did he not blow on them, but he even opposed the youth, teasing him, like some sly old dog, as if he loved to play with youthful inexperience. One day, therefore, when Zbyszko had again spoken of going on some distant expedition in order to rid himself of his unbearable life, Macko exclaimed:

"When you were a beardless boy I ruled you; but now—as you will! If you mean to go, trusting only in your own wisdom—then go!"

Zbyszko started with astonishment and sat up in his bed.

"What!" he said. "Then you do not oppose me in that?"

"Why should I? I am only terribly sorry for our house, for it will perish with you. . . . But perhaps there may be some help even for that."

"What help?" asked Zbyszko uneasily.

"What help!" echoed Macko. "Well, it is not to be denied that my age is respectable, but still my bones are not lacking in strength. Assuredly some younger fellow would be more fitting for Jagienka, still, seeing that I was a friend of her dead father, perhaps—who knows? . . ."

"Then, if you were her father's friend," exclaimed Zbyszko angrily, "you were never mine!—never! never!"

And he broke off, for he felt his lips beginning to tremble.

"Well," said Macko, "as you are determined to perish, then what am I to do?"

"Good! Then do what you like—and I will go straight-way into the world again to-day!"

"Fool!" repeated Macko.

And again he left the chamber abruptly, and went off to supervise the peasants of Bogdaniec, and those lent by Jagienka from Zgorzelice and Moczydoly that they might help in digging the ditch that was to encircle the castle.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

ZBYSZKO, however, did not carry out his threat and did not set out. A week later he had recovered his health so completely that he could no longer keep to his bed. Macko therefore said that it behoved them to go to Zgorzelice in order to thank Jagienka for all her care, and Zbyszko, having taken a vapour bath, decided to ride over without delay. He had his finest clothes taken out of the chest, and put them on in place of the dress which he usually wore. He then occupied himself with the arrangement of his hair. This, however, was neither a small nor an easy matter, because of its luxuriance, for it fell over his shoulders like a mane down to his shoulder blades. For the occasion of everyday life the knights wore their hair in nets, in the form of a sort of mushroom. This was convenient, for during war it lessened the pressure of the helm. But when attending festivities of different kinds, such as weddings, or when visiting houses where there were ladies, they usually arranged their hair in carefully curled ringlets, which were often dressed with white of egg to make them glossy and retain their form.

It was thus that Zbyszko wished to have his hair dressed. But the two women who were summoned for the purpose from the servants' hall, being unaccustomed to such work, were unable to do it properly. The hair, having become dry and bristly after the bath, would not consent to lie down in an orderly fashion, but kept rising up like a badly made thatch on a hut. Neither the finely made combs of bison's horn, taken as booty from the Frieslanders, nor even a horse-comb, fetched by one of the women from the stable, was of any use. At last Zbyszko began to grow impatient and angry, when, to his surprise, Macko entered the chamber accompanied by Jagienka, who had arrived unexpectedly.

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" said the girl.

"For ever and ever!" responded Zbyszko, his face brightening at the sight of her. "Well, it is strange! We were just on the point of going over to Zgorzelice, and here you are!"

And his eyes glistened with joy, for now, as often as he saw her, the darkness of his soul was illumined as when one beholds the sunrise.

But Jagienka, seeing the embarrassed women with the combs in their hands, the great horse comb lying on the bench by Zbyszko's side, and his wealth of tousled hair, began to laugh.

"Well!" she exclaimed, showing her wonderful white teeth between her rosy lips. "There's a bush!—a perfect bush! Why, you ought to be put on a hemp field or in a cherry garden for a scarecrow!"

At this Zbyszko frowned.

"We were about to go to Zgorzelice," he said, "but there it would not be fitting for you to rail at a guest. Here you may scoff at me to the top of your bent; and, in faith, you are always ready to do so!"

"Am I, indeed?" said she. "Well, well! Why, I came to ask you to come with me to supper, and I am laughing, not at you, but at those women, for were I in their place I could do that quickly enough."

"But you would not."

"And pray, who does it for Jasko?"

"But Jasko is your brother."

"Ah, yes! . . ."

But here the old and wily Macko resolved to come to their aid.

"In our families," said he, "when the hair of a knight's son has grown again after Postrzyzyny,* his sister curls it, and in riper years the wife does the like for her husband. But it is also customary, when a knight has neither sister nor wife, for some noble maid—even though she be a complete stranger—to perform the service for him."

"Is there indeed such a custom?" said Jagienka, lowering her eyes.

"It prevails not only in manors," he went on, "but in castles also, and even at the King's court."

* An ancient Polish festivity, when a boy, at the age of seven, has his hair cut for the first time.

Here he turned to the women.

"If you are useless," he said, "then be off to the servants' hall."

"Let them bring me some warm water," added the girl.

Macko went out along with the women under the pretext of seeing that they did not tarry with the water. This was presently sent and left in the chamber, the young people remaining alone.

Jagienka first soaked a kerchief, and with it thoroughly moistened Zbyszko's hair. When it had ceased to bristle, and lay smooth under the influence of the warm water, she took a comb and sat down on the bench close to him in order to continue her work.

Thus they sat beside each other, both exceedingly handsome and loving each other passionately, but both silent and confused. At length Jagienka began to arrange his golden hair, and as he felt the proximity of her raised arms and her hands he trembled from top to toe, restraining himself with all the power of his will lest he should seize her by the waist and press her with all his strength to his bosom.

Their quickened breathing could be heard in the silence.

"Are you ill?" asked Jagienka presently. "What ails you?"

"Nothing!" answered the young knight.

"For you pant so."

"You are panting too. . . ."

Again there was silence. Jagienka's cheeks blushed like roses, for she felt that Zbyszko did not for a moment turn his eyes from off her face. She therefore tried to disguise her own confusion by means of speech.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked.

"Does it annoy you?"

"No, I only ask."

"Jagienka?"

"What? . . ."

Zbyszko took a full breath, and moved his lips as if about to say something more. But apparently he lacked courage to proceed, for again he simply repeated:

"Jagienka? . . ."

"What? . . ."

"I am afraid to say it."

"Do not be afraid. I am only a girl, not a dragon."

"Assuredly no dragon! Yet my uncle Macko declares he wants to take you!"

"So he does—but not for himself!"

And she stopped suddenly, as if frightened by her own words.

"By heaven, Jagienka!" exclaimed Zbyszko. "What do you mean by this?"

But her eyes suddenly filled with tears, her beautiful lips began to tremble, and her voice fell so low that he could scarcely hear her as she said:

"My father and the abbot wished it, and I—as for me—you yourself know. . . ."

At these words joy broke forth in his heart like a sudden flame. He seized her in his arms and, raising her from the ground like a feather, cried rapturously:

"Jagienka, my gold! Jagienka, my sun! Ah, Jagienka!"

And he cried so loudly that old Macko, thinking that something extraordinary was taking place, rushed into the chamber. But when he saw Jagienka already in Zbyszko's arms he was amazed that all had passed so quickly.

"In the name of Heaven," he called out, "restrain yourself, my lad—restrain yourself!"

Zbyszko ran towards him and placed Jagienka on her feet. Both would have knelt down before him, but ere they could do so the old man seized them in his long boney arms and clasped them firmly to his bosom.

"God be praised!" he said. "I knew that it would end in this way; still I am glad! God bless you both! Now I can die easier. . . . A maid of purest gold. . . . Beloved of God and of the people! Now that I have lived to see such consolation, let come what will! God has tried, but He has comforted also. . . . We must now go to Zgorzelice and tell Jasko. Ah, if only old Zych were alive! . . . And the abbot! . . . But I will replace them, for, to tell the truth, I love you both more than I can say."

Although he had in his bosom a heart of steel he was so moved that a great lump seemed to rise in his throat. So, having embraced Zbyszko once more and kissed Jagienka on both cheeks, exclaiming almost with tears as he did so: "That is no girl, but honey!" he went off to the stable to have the horses saddled.

In the courtyard he reeled with joy at the sight of the sunflowers growing before the house. He stopped and

gazed like a drunken man at their dark discs encircled with yellow leaves.

"There are many of you," he said, "but if God grant it, there will yet be more of the Gradys of Bogdaniec!"

As he made his way to the stable he muttered to himself:

"Bogdaniec—the abbot's estates—Spychow—Moczydoly. . . . God alone knows what He is leading to, but when old Wilk's time comes then it will be only right to buy Brzozowa also. They are fine meadows! . . ."

Meanwhile Jagienka and Zbyszko also came out into the courtyard, looking happy, sprightly and bright as the sun.

"Uncle!" called Zbyszko from the distance.

And Macko turned round towards them, stretched out his arms, and cried out as if he were in the forest:

"Halloo! halloo! Come on! C-o-m-e o-n!"

PART XI.

CHAPTER LXXX.

ZBYSZKO and Jagienka dwelt at Moczydoly while the old knight Macko was building a castle for them at Bogdaniec. The work was toilsome, for Macko wished to have the lower walls of stone and mortar and the watch-tower of brick, and these materials were not easily obtained in the neighbourhood. In the first year he dug out the ditches, a task which was not difficult, as the hill upon which the castle was to be raised had formerly been entrenched—probably in heathen times—and so it was only necessary to clear the trenches of the trees and hawthorn bushes that had overgrown them, and afterwards to strengthen and deepen them. While digging out the ditches they encountered an abundant spring, which soon filled the moat, so that Macko was obliged to provide an escape for the overflow of water.

He next erected a palisade on the mound, and began collecting timber for the castle walls. There were oak beams so thick that even three men were unable to span them, and others of larch which would withstand the moisture of either clay or turf. Although the peasants of Zgorzelice and Moczydoly aided old Macko constantly, it was not until a year had passed that he was able to set about raising the walls. But now he laboured with renewed ardour, for meanwhile Jagienka had already been blessed with twin sons. It was as if heaven had been opened to the eyes of the old knight, for now he had some one for whom he could work and toil, and he knew that the family of the Gradys would not now perish, but that their emblem, the blunt horseshoe, would yet be imbued many a time in the blood of their foes.

The boys were called Macko and Jasko. "They are as sturdy fellows," the old man would say, "as any in the whole kingdom—and it is not evening yet!" He loved the lads exceedingly; and as for Jagienka, there was nothing in the whole world to compare with her. Any one who praised her in his presence might obtain anything of him. Zbyszko was greatly envied because of her, and it was not only for profit's sake that she was praised, for she shone in the whole neighbourhood like the most beautiful blossom in a meadow. It was true that she had brought her husband a great dowry, but she had brought him much more besides—a great love, beauty that dazzled the eye, courtly manners, and strength such as many a knight might have coveted. She was loved by her husband as the apple of his eye, she was loved by old Macko, she was loved by the retainers, for whom she had ever a benevolent heart; she was loved by the people of Krzesnia, who, when she entered the church on Sunday, greeted her with a buzz of admiration and praise. Her former suitor, the terrible Cztan of Rogow, who had now married a peasant's daughter, and who was in the habit of drinking at the inn with old Wilk of Brzozowa after mass, used often to say to his companion, when the liquor had begun to reach his head: "Ah, we used to hack each other about for her sake, your son and I, and we were each bent upon having her! But that—why, it was as if we had stretched out our hands for the moon!"

Others declared loudly that the place of such a woman was only at the King's court in Krakow. With one voice people extolled her beauty, her courtly manners, her wealth and her vigour, not only in Krzesnia but in the neighbouring villages, and even in the chief town of Sieradz. But, while they envied Zbyszko of Bogdaniec his good fortune, they were not surprised that he had obtained her, for there was no one else in the neighbourhood whose military glory could compare with his.

Young wloodykas and noblemen told each other long tales concerning the Germans whom Zbyszko had slain in battles under the command of Witold, or in single combat. They related how no German had ever come from his hands unscathed; that in Marienburg he had unhorsed twelve of them, among them being the Grand Master's brother Ulrich; that he was able to match his sword even against the knights of Krakow; and that the invincible Zawisza the Black was his friend and well-wisher. There were some

who were reluctant to believe the extraordinary tales that were told of him, but even they, when it was a question of choosing a Polish knight from among the nobles of the neighbourhood to match himself against some foreigner in the lists, never hesitated to nominate Zbyszko first, and the shaggy Cztan of Rogow and the other warriors of the district—who were far behind the young lord of Bogdaniec in knightly training—afterwards

His great wealth had gained him not only fame but also consideration and respect. The fact that, with Jagienka, he had obtained Moczydoly and the large estate of the abbot, could not be ascribed to his personal merit, but he already possessed Spychow, with the enormous treasure gathered by Jurand; and people whispered that, in addition to this, the mere booty taken and brought home by the knights of Bogdaniec, consisting of armour, horses, clothing, and jewels, was of sufficient value to purchase three or four large villages.

In all this men saw a sign of God's special favour for the house of Grady, which not long ago had fallen so low as to possess nothing but Bogdaniec, but which now surpassed all other houses for miles around. Old people related that after the destruction of Bogdaniec by fire there was nothing left but an old and tottering house, and that for lack of labourers the family had been compelled to mortgage the estate to a kinsman. And now they were building a castle. At this there was great wonder, but the wonder was in no way mingled with malicious envy, for everywhere men had an instinctive feeling that the whole nation was, in like fashion, being impelled onwards by some irresistible force towards some greater destiny, and that the new order of things was in accordance with the will of God. Therefore their neighbours used rather to boast and be proud of the knights of Bogdaniec, for they were a visible proof of what a nobleman might achieve by means of a strong arm and a stout heart, together with a love of chivalrous adventure. And so, at the sight of them, many a man felt the trammels of domestic life irksome to him, for he knew that but a little way off, beyond the border, there were great treasures and fertile lands still in the hands of the foe, from whom they might be wrested to the great personal advantage of the victor, as well as for the benefit of the whole kingdom. This restlessness which moved the great families stirred the spirit of the whole community, so that the conscious strength of the

nation bade fair to overflow, as boiling water flows over the rim of the vessel that holds it. The prudent lords of Krakow and the peace-loving King might restrain these forces for a time, and delay for long years to come the threatening war with their ancient foe, but no human power could stifle them completely, or check the impulse which was driving towards glory and greatness the soul of a whole people.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

MACKO had lived to see happy days. He used often to tell his neighbours that he had been given more than he had ever hoped for. Even old age had merely whitened his hair and his beard, but had hitherto deprived him neither of health nor strength. His heart was full of such gladness as he had never felt before. His face, which had formerly been severe, grew softer, and he greeted every one with a kindly smile. In his soul he felt that all his troubles were at an end, and that now he would see no more care or distress, but that the days of his life would flow calmly on like a bright, unruffled stream. To engage in warfare until the approach of old age, to manage the household and increase the estate for his "grandchildren" during his closing years—such had been his greatest desire at all times, and assuredly all had been fulfilled according to his wish. The household was thriving wonderfully. The pine forests had been extensively cleared; fresh meadows, weeded and sown, grew green with corn of different kinds every spring; the cattle were increasing—on the pasture land there were forty mares with foals, which were inspected daily by the old knight; herds of sheep and oxen grazed upon the fallow land and among the bushes. Bogdaniec was completely changed. From a devastated settlement it had grown into a populous and prosperous village; and the stranger who approached it was dazzled by the great watch-tower, visible from afar, and by the castle walls, which time had not yet darkened, and which glistened like gold in the sunlight and at sunset were mantled in purple.

A year later the twin sons were followed by another boy, whom Jagienka, in honour of her father and to commemorate his name, called Zych. Macko greeted him with joy, for he was not at all disturbed by the knowledge that if Zbyszko's heirs should continue to multiply, the estate which had been

amassed with so much trouble and toil must one day be divided.

"What had we formerly?" he said one day to his nephew. "Nothing! But now heaven has blessed us. Old Pakosz of Sulislawice has but one village and two-and-twenty sons, and yet they do not starve. Are there not many lands in the kingdom and in Lithuania? Are there not many towns and castles still in the hands of those hounds, the Knights of the Cross? Ha! if only the Lord Jesus grant it! There we should have goodly quarters, for their castles are built wholly of red bricks, and our gracious King would have need of castellans for them."

It was strange that, while the Order was yet at the summit of its power, while it surpassed all the Western kingdoms in wealth, influence and military might, old Macko should, nevertheless, still think of the Teutonic castles as future abodes for his grandchildren. And there were doubtless many throughout the kingdom of Jagiello who regarded them in similar fashion, not merely because they knew that the Order was settled on ancient Polish lands, but because they were conscious of the mighty force which was stirring the breast of the nation, making it look on all sides for an issue.

It was only in the fourth year after Zbyszko's marriage that the castle was finished. The neighbours had helped in its completion, and especially old Wilk of Brzozowa who, left alone on the death of his son, had become exceedingly fond of Macko, as well as of Zbyszko and his wife. Macko adorned the chambers with the spoils of war which he and his nephew had taken from the Germans, or had inherited from Jurand of Spychow. In similar fashion, he employed the property of the abbot, and that which Jagienka had brought from her father's house. He had glass windows brought from Sieradz, such as befitted so magnificent a dwelling. In the fifth year, when the other buildings—the stables, the cow-houses, the kitchens, and the bath-houses—had been finished, as well as the dungeons, which were solidly built of stone and mortar so as to be of imperishable durability, Zbyszko, with his wife and children, took up their abode in the castle. Macko, however, preferred to remain in the old house, and withstood all the requests of Zbyszko and Jagienka that he should live with them in the castle.

"I will die where I was born," he explained to them. "You see, during the fighting of the Grzymalits with the Nalenczs, Bogdaniec was burnt down—all the buildings, the huts, and even the fences—and only this house was left. People said it would not burn because of the abundant mosses that had overgrown its roof, but I think that it was spared by God's mercy—that it was His will that we should return hither and go forth hence anew. I used often to complain that we had nowhere to return to, but that was not really true; for, faith! though there was nothing to keep house with, and nothing to put in our mouths, still there was always a roof to cover us. You younger folks are not placed as I am, but as for me I think that, as the old house did not fail us, I cannot forsake it."

And so he remained. Yet he loved to come to the castle, to compare its size and splendour with the old abode, and at the same time to see Zbyszko, Jagienka, and the children. Although all that he saw there was in a great measure his own handiwork, he could not but be filled with pride and admiration at the sight of it. Sometimes old Wilk would come and gossip with him at his fireside, and sometimes Macko went over to Brzozowa for the same purpose. On one such occasion the old knight gave expression to his thoughts on the change that had taken place in their fortunes.

"Look you!" he said. "It all makes me wonder at times! Everybody knows, of course, that Zbyszko has been in Krakow at the King's court (yes, and they nearly cut off his head for him there!), and in Mazovia, and in Marienburg, and at the court of Prince Janusz, and that Jagienka too was brought up in prosperity. But they never had a castle of their own! And now it seems as if they had never lived out of one. I tell you, they walk about the chambers—they walk about, I say—and give commands to all their servants, and then, when they are tired, then—then they sit down and rest. Truly, they are like any castellan and his lady! Likewise they have a hall in which they dine, along with their bailiffs, their field-keepers, and their retinue, and there are the higher benches for him and for her, and the others sit lower down, and wait until the Pan and his lady have filled their plates. There they have such courtly manners that I have to take care not to forget that they are not

a great lord and lady, but merely my own nephew and niece, who kiss my old hands and make me sit in the highest place, calling me their benefactor."

"That is the reason why the Lord Jesus blesses them," said old Wilk.

Hereupon he bowed his head sorrowfully, drank a little mead, stirred the firebrands with the iron poker, and said:

"And my lad perished!"

"Such was God's will."

"Ah, yes! The elder boys—there were five—were slain long before. But you knew that. Of course, it was God's will! Still, the last was the stoutest of them—a true Wilk; and had he not been slain then he too might now be sitting in his own castle."

"It would have been better had Cztan been slain instead."

"Cztan, forsooth. Do you speak of Cztan? They say he can carry millstones on his back, and yet my boy often hacked him terribly! But he had knightly training, and Cztan now lets his wife smite him in the face, for though he is a sturdy fellow enough he is nevertheless a fool."

"As foolish as a sheep!" said Macko approvingly. And the old man seized the opportunity to extol, not merely the merits of chivalrous training in general, but, in particular, the knightly skill of Zbyszko. He had fought with deadly weapons, said Macko, against the foremost knights of the time, and as for speaking with princes, that, to him, was like cracking nuts. He also praised his nephew's shrewdness and diligence in the management of his household, without which the castle would speedily have eaten up the estate. But, lest old Wilk should imagine that anything of the kind did threaten them, he concluded in a low voice, saying:

"Well, thanks to God's mercy, there is enough of all kinds of property—more than people perhaps guess, but you must not say that to anybody."

But people guessed, knew, and told each other—sometimes with exaggeration—of the possessions of the Pans of Spychow, and especially, of the wealth which they were said to have taken from Spychow. It was related that they had brought from Mazovia many salt barrels full of money. Macko, moreover, accommodated

the powerful Pans of Koniecpole with a loan, and this served to confirm fully all his neighbours' estimates of his treasure. Thus the influence of the Pans of Bogdaniec increased, as did also the esteem in which they were held, so that there was never any lack of visitors in the castle. Although thrifty, Macko was by no means displeased to see this, for he knew that it served to extend still further the fame of the family.

Christenings were celebrated with special magnificence, and once a year, after the festival of the Assumption, Zbyszko invited his neighbours to a great feast. Many ladies also came, in order to grace the tournaments with their presence, to listen to the songs of the minstrels, and to dance until morning with the young knights by the light of the blazing pine torches. Old Macko used to feast his eyes on Zbyszko and Jagienka, so courtly and dignified was their bearing. The young Pan had grown stout and tall; although his face seemed young in comparison with his strength and stature, yet, when he had fastened his abundant hair with a purple headband and donned his magnificent dress woven of gold and silver thread, then not only Macko but many of the guests said to themselves: "By heaven, he is truly like a prince in his castle!" And knights acquainted with Western customs knelt down before Jagienka and asked her to be the lady of their thoughts, such was the radiance of health, youth, vigour, and beauty that she shed around her. Even the old lord of Koniecpole, who was also the Palatine of Sieradz, was astonished at the sight of her, and likened her to the morning dawn, and even to the sun, which, as he said, "Gives light to the world and fills even old bones with a new life."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

IN the fifth year, when thorough order had at length been introduced into all the villages, when the banner bearing the blunt horseshoe had been flying for several months over the finished watch-tower, and Jagienka had been happily delivered of a fourth son, whom they called Jurand, old Macko said one day to his nephew:

"Everything prospers now, and if the Lord Jesus would but grant us good fortune in one more matter, then I should die happy."

Zbyszko looked at him inquiringly and, after pausing a while, said:

"Now you are surely thinking of the war with the Knights of the Cross, for what else is there for you to wish for?"

"I tell you now what I told you once before," answered Macko, "that as long as the Grand Master Konrad is alive there will be no war."

"Will he live for ever, think you?"

"No, nor shall I, and therefore it is of something else that I am thinking."

"What else?"

"Well, it matters little—it is best that I say nothing of it now. But meanwhile, I am going to Spychow, and perhaps I shall see the Princess of Plock and of Czersk too."

The reply did not greatly surprise Zbyszko, for during the past few years Macko had gone several times to Spychow, so he merely asked:

"Will you stay away long?"

"Longer than usual," answered the old man, "for I shall stay for a time in Plock."

A week afterwards Macko departed, taking with him several waggons and a good set of armour, "In case," as he observed, "it should chance that he was obliged to

fight." In taking leave he repeated that he might, perhaps, be gone longer than usual, and indeed he did remain away much longer, for there was no news of him for six months afterwards. Zbyszko began to grow uneasy, and at length he sent a special messenger to Spychow, but not far beyond Sieradz the messenger encountered him and returned along with him.

The old knight was somewhat gloomy on his return, but after having questioned Zbyszko concerning all that had happened during his absence, and being satisfied that all was well, he brightened a little and presently began to speak of his travels.

"You know that I have been to Marienburg?" said he.

"To Marienburg!"

"And where else should I have been?"

For a time Zbyszko looked at him with amazement. Suddenly he slapped his thigh, and exclaimed:

"By heaven! I had completely forgotten that!"

"You may have forgotten," answered Macko, "because you have fulfilled your vows, but it is not Heaven's will that I should infringe my oath and my honour. It is not our custom to swerve from anything, and—may the Holy Cross help me!—I will never forget him while I have breath in my body!"

Macko's face darkened and grew resolute and terrible in a fashion that made Zbyszko think of his uncle in the old days, years before, under Witold and Skirwoillo, when a battle against the Knights of the Cross was approaching.

"What happened?" he asked. "Did he escape you?"

"No, for he did not appear in the lists."

"For what reason?"

"He has become Grand Commander."

"Kuno von Lichtenstein has become Grand Commander!"

"Ay, and they may even elect him Grand Master—who knows? Already he thinks himself the equal of princes. They say that he rules in everything, that all the affairs of the Order depend upon him, and that the Grand Master undertakes nothing without his counsel. How could such a man appear in the lists? To expect it would but make men laugh."

"Did they deride you, then?" asked Zbyszko, his eyes suddenly flashing with anger.

"At Plock the Princess Alexandra laughed at me. 'Go,

then,' said she, 'and challenge the Roman Emperor! We know that Zawisza the Black and Paszko of Biskupice challenged him, but even to such as they he gave no satisfaction, for he cannot. Assuredly he does not lack courage, but,' said she, 'he is a monk, and holds a great and worthy office, so that such things are beneath his thoughts, and he would lose in honour more by accepting such challenges than by disregarding them.' Thus did the lady speak."

"And what did you say to all this?"

"I was sorely grieved, but I told her that I must nevertheless go to Marienburg so that I might say before God and man: 'What lay in my power I did accomplish.' So I entreated the Princess that she might devise some mission for me in Marienburg, and give me a letter, for I knew that otherwise I should never escape in safety out of that den of wolves. Yet in my soul I thought thus: 'It may be that he has refused the challenges of Zawisza, Powala, and Paszko, and yet if I were to seize him in the presence of the Grand Master, the komthurs, and the guests, and grasp him by the beard or the moustache, then, surely he would fight.'"

"Heaven help you!" exclaimed Zbyszko fervently.

"Ah," said the old knight, "there is help for everything if a man has but a head on his shoulders. But in this the Lord Jesus did not grant me His favour, for I did not find Lichtenstein in Marienburg. They told me that he had gone as an envoy to Prince Witold. I did not know what to do then, whether to wait there or to follow him. I was afraid lest I should pass him on the way. I had known the Grand Master and the Grand Wardrobe-keeper in the old days, and so I confided to them the purpose of my coming, but with one accord they declared at once that it was impossible."

"Why?"

"For the same reason that the Princess of Plock had given me. 'What would you think of me,' said the Grand Master, 'if I accepted the challenges of every Mazovian or Polish knight?' And he was right, for in that case he would have been slain long ago. Both he and the Grand Wardrobe-keeper were astonished at me, and they related the circumstances of my journey at supper. Then, I tell you, there was a hubbub as if one had blown into a beehive. At once there rose up a whole band of them

among the guests. 'Kuno cannot fight,' they cried, 'but we can!' So I named three of them, intending to fight them in turns, but the Grand Master, in spite of many entreaties, would permit only one of them to appear against me. His name was Lichtenstein also, and he was a kinsman of Kuno."

"And what came of it?" asked Zbyszko eagerly.

"Well, I have brought his armour with me, but it is so shattered that no one would give even a mark for it."

"By heaven! Then you have accomplished your vow!"

"At first I was glad, for I too thought so, but afterwards I said to myself: 'No, it is not the same!' And now I have no rest, for maybe it is not the same."

But Zbyszko began to console him.

"You know me," he said, "and you know that in such matters I please neither myself nor any one else; but I say that had it happened so to me, then I should have been satisfied. And I tell you that in this the greatest knights of Krakow will bear me out. Zawisza himself, the greatest authority of all in things concerning knightly honour, will not say otherwise."

"Do you mean this?" asked Macko.

"Think; these men are famed throughout the whole world. They too challenged him, but not one of them achieved so much as you. You vowed that you would slay Lichtenstein, and Lichtenstein you have slain."

"It may be so," said the old knight.

"Now tell me," said Zbyszko, ever curious concerning matters of chivalry, "was he old or young, and how did he bear himself; was it on horseback or on foot?"

"He was some thirty-five years old and had a beard falling to his girdle, and it was on horseback. God aided me, so that I struck him with my spear, and then it came to swords. I tell you, the blood gushed forth from his mouth, so that his whole beard was clotted like an icicle."

"And yet you used to complain that you were growing old!"

"True; when I sit still on horseback or stand firmly on the ground I can hold my own, but I can no longer leap about in the saddle in full armour."

"Kuno himself would not escape you."

The old man waved his hand contemptuously, as if to

signify that to get rid of Kuno would give him much less pains. Then they went to look at the armour which Macko had brought back, but merely as a token of victory, for it was too sorely shattered to serve any other purpose, and was therefore worthless. The cuish and the greaves alone, which were of excellent workmanship, had not been damaged.

"I should have preferred them to be Kuno's," said Macko gloomily.

"God knows what is best," answered Zbyszko. "If Kuno is made Grand Master you will never meet him again, unless it be in some great battle."

"I kept my ears open to what people were saying," said Macko. "Some say that Konrad will be followed by Kuno, and others that his brother Ulrich will succeed him."

"I should prefer that it were Ulrich," said Zbyszko.

"I, too. And do you know why? Kuno has wisdom and craft, but Ulrich is more vehement. Ulrich is a true knight and mindful of honour, but he trembles with impatience for a war against us. They say, too, that if he should become Grand Master, then there will come speedily a storm such as the world has never seen. Moreover, Konrad has often attacks of bodily weakness. Once he swooned away in my presence. Ah, it may be that we shall yet live long enough to see it!"

"May Heaven grant it! Have the Knights any fresh quarrels with our kingdom?"

"There are quarrels both old and new. A Knight of the Cross remains ever a Knight of the Cross. Though they know that you are the stronger, and that it is not well to fall out with you, nevertheless they will ever lie in wait for your property, for that is their nature."

"Surely they think their Order stronger than any other kingdom?"

"Not all of them, but there are some that do, and among those is Ulrich. And, indeed, their might is terrible!"

"Do you remember what Zyndram of Maszkow said of them?"

"I do. And it grows worse there every year. A brother could not greet another brother more heartily than the people received me, when no Knight of the

Cross was looking on. Every one there has had enough of them."

"Then we cannot have long to wait?"

"Perhaps—and perhaps not," answered Macko. He pondered for a time, and then added: "For the present we can but labour and toil to increase our estate, so that we may make a fitting appearance in the field."

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

A YEAR later the Grand Master Konrad died. Jagienka's brother, Jasko, who heard in Sieradz the news of his death and of the election of Ulrich von Jungingen in his stead, was the first to bring it to Bogdaniec, where, as in all the other dwellings of the great, it stirred to their depths the hearts and souls of all who heard it. "There will be times," said Macko solemnly, "such as men have never yet seen!" and in the first moment of excitement Jagienka led all her children to Zbyszko, and began to take leave of him, as if he were about to set out on the following day. Macko and his nephew, however, knew that war was not wont to be kindled in a moment, like fire on a heath, but they foresaw that it must come, and they began to prepare. They set about choosing horses, and armour, training in military craft their grooms, the bailiffs of the villages, who were bound by law to appear in war on horseback, and the wloodykas, or lesser gentry, who were eager to rally round the banner of the wealthier houses. The same was being done at all other manors; everywhere hammers rang on anvils; everywhere old cuirasses were being cleaned, cross-bows and leather straps were being smeared with hog's grease, waggon wheels were being hooped with iron, stores of provisions—mainly composed of groats and smoked viands—were being prepared. At church, on Sundays and saints' days, men asked each other for news, and grieved when the tidings were peaceful, for all felt in their souls that it behoved them to get rid once and for ever of the terrible enemy of the whole nation, and that the kingdom would never thrive in power, peace, and advancement until, in the words of Saint Bridget, the teeth of the Knights of the Cross should be broken and their right hand cut off.

As they were men acquainted with the Order and experi-

enced in war against the Germans, Macko and Zbyszko were often surrounded in Krzesnia by many people who were anxious for news. These were wont also to ask concerning the best expedients to employ against the Germans; how they should be attacked, what was their manner of fighting, in what respects they were superior to the Poles and in what inferior, and whether, when spears were broken, it was better to attack them with axes or with swords.

In these matters Macko and Zbyszko were, indeed, well versed, and they were, therefore, listened to with great attention, the more so because there was a general conviction that the war would be no easy one, that the Poles would have to measure their swords against the foremost knights of every land, and that they would not have to content themselves with inflicting loss upon the enemy here and there, but must crush them utterly, or themselves perish. Therefore the wloodykas would say among themselves: "If it must be, then so be it; their death or ours!" But this in no way diminished the eagerness of a generation who bore in their souls a presentiment of the great events that were approaching; their eagerness rather increased every day and every hour, yet it was without idle vanity and boasting that they busied themselves with the work of preparation, but rather with a stubborn steadfastness of mind and a solemn preparedness for death.

"Their death or ours!"

But meanwhile time passed, men wearied, and yet there was no war. There was talk, indeed, of quarrels between King Wladyslaw and the Order; of the Dobrzyn land, although they had been long ago redeemed; of borderland disputes; of differences concerning a place called Drezdenko, of which most men now heard for the first time in their lives; but yet there was no war. Some began even to doubt whether it would ever come, for, although such disputes were continual, all were settled by means of congresses, negotiations, or the sending of envoys. And now the news went forth that Teuton envoys had arrived in Krakow and that Polish envoys had gone to Marienburg. There was talk of the intervention of the Kings of Bohemia and Hungary, and even of the Pope himself. In the districts far removed from Krakow nothing was known with certainty, and so rumours

of different kinds, often strange and improbable, flew about among the people. But still there was no war.

At length even Macko himself, within whose memory were many similar threatening portents of war, scarcely knew what to think of it all, and set out for Krakow in order to obtain more trustworthy intelligence. He did not remain there long, but returned in the sixth week after his departure, and with a face much brighter than before. In Krzesnia the noblemen, eager for news, crowded round him as usual, and at once attacked him with many questions. To these, however, he replied with another question:

"And your spear-heads and axes, are they sharpened?"

"What say you? For heaven's sake, quick! What is the news? Whom have you seen?" they exclaimed on every side.

"Whom have I seen? I have seen Zyndram of Maszkow! What news? News that may soon make us saddle our horses!"

"By heaven! How so? Tell us!"

"Have you heard of Drezdenko?"

"Assuredly we have. But it is a small castle; there are many such, and as for its lands they are no larger than Bogdaniec."

"Is not that a paltry reason for war?"

"It is indeed; there have been weightier reasons, and yet nothing came of them."

"And shall I tell you the proverb that Zyndram of Maszkow told me with respect to this same Drezdenko?"

"Tell us—quick!—our caps are burning our heads!"

"He spoke thus: 'A blind man walked along a highway, and stumbled over a stone. He stumbled because he was blind, and yet the stone was the cause of his stumbling.' Well, I tell you, Drezdenko is such a stone."

"How so? The Order yet stands!"

"You do not understand? Then I will give it you otherwise: When a vessel is full, then a single drop will serve to overflow it."

Hereupon the knights became so impetuous that they wished to mount their horses and set out for Sieradz forthwith, but Macko was obliged to restrain them.

"Be ready," said he to them, "but wait patiently; they will assuredly not forget us."

So they continued their preparations. But they waited

long, so long that some of them began to doubt anew. Macko, however, did not doubt, for, as one may divine the approach of spring by the arrival of birds, so he, being a warrior of experience, was able to conclude by means of various signs, that war was, indeed, approaching, and that a great war.

Thus, hunts were ordered in all the royal forests, and so great were they that even the oldest people could not remember their like. Men gathered in thousands to beat the woods, and whole herds of bison, stags, boars, and smaller game of different sorts were killed. For weeks and months fires smouldered in the forests, so that salted meats might be smoked before being sent off to the chief towns in the neighbourhood, and thence to Plock. It was plain that these were supplies for a great army. Macko knew well what to think of this, for Witold had ordered great hunts like these before all his great expeditions in Lithuania. Nor were these the only signs. Peasants from the German lands came flying in crowds to the kingdom and to Mazovia. In the neighbourhood it was mostly the subjects of the German knights in Silesia who came, but all knew that the same thing was going on everywhere, and especially in Mazovia. Hlawa, the Bohemian, who was managing the household at Spychow, sent on a score of Mazovians who had fled to him for shelter from Prussia. The men craved permission to take part in the war on foot, for they wished to avenge the wrongs done them by the Knights of the Cross, whom they heartily hated. They told, too, how many of the border villages in Prussia were almost completely deserted, as the peasants, with their wives and families, had removed to the Mazovian principality. The Knights of the Cross were in the habit of hanging fugitives when caught, but nothing could now restrain the unhappy people, and many a man preferred death to life under the terrible German yoke.

Soon "beggars" from Prussia began to swarm throughout the whole country. All made their way towards Krakow, and they came from Dantzic, from Marienburg, from Thorn, even from distant Königsberg, and from all the towns and provinces of Prussia. Among them there were not only beggars, but sacristans, organists, church functionaries of different kinds, and even seminarists and priests. People guessed that these men carried with

them intelligence of all that was going on in Prussia, of the preparations for war, of castle fortifications, of the strength of garrisons, of the mercenaries and the foreign guests. It was whispered, indeed, that in the chief towns the Palatines, and in Krakow the royal councillors, were often closeted with them for hours together, listening to them and writing down their communications. Some of them were known to have returned secretly to Prussia, and to have appeared once more in the kingdom. It was rumoured from Krakow that with their help the King and his council had been apprised of every step taken by the Knights of the Cross.

But in Marienburg things were proceeding quite otherwise. A clergyman, who had escaped from that capital and now lodged with the lords of Koniecpole, declared that the Grand Master Ulrich and the Knights of the Cross cared nothing for intelligence from Poland, and that they felt sure they should conquer and overthrow the whole kingdom for ever at a single blow, "so that no trace of it shall be left." And he repeated the words of the Grand Master himself, spoken at a banquet in Marienburg: "The more there are of them, the cheaper will sheepskins be in Prussia!" With light-hearted exultation they prepared for the war, confident in their own might and in the help that would come to them even from the remotest kingdoms.

Yet in spite of all these warlike signs, preparations and exertions, the war did not come so quickly as people wished. The young lord of Bogdaniec grew weary of remaining at home. All was long since ready, and his heart was set upon fighting and fame. Every day of delay, therefore, pressed heavily upon him, and often did he reproach his uncle with it, as if the making of war or peace rested with Macko.

"You promised surely that it would come," he said, "and there is nothing—nothing at all!"

"You are shrewd," answered Macko, "and yet you might be shrewder. Cannot you see what is going on?"

"And if the King should come to an understanding at the last moment? They say he does not desire the war."

"He does not. Yet who else but he exclaimed: 'Unless I am no longer King, they shall not take Drezdenko!' And the Germans have taken and still

keep Drezdenko! Well, the King does not wish to spill Christian blood, but his councillors, who are shrewd and crafty, are conscious of the greater power of Poland. Therefore they are inclined to press the Germans, and I tell you that, if Drezdenko had never been, then something else would have been found."

"But I have heard that Drezdenko was taken by the Grand Master Konrad, and he assuredly stood in fear of the King."

"He did, for he knew the Polish power better than all others, but he too was unable to restrain the cupidity of the Order. In Krakow they told me that, when the Knights of the Cross took Neumark, von Ost, the old lord of Drezdenko, did homage to the King, because his lands had been Polish from time immemorial, and he therefore wished to be subject to the kingdom. But the Knights of the Cross invited him to Marienburg, and there they made him drunk with wine, and so obtained from him a bequest of his estates. Then the remainder of the King's patience was exhausted at last."

"And so, in faith, it might be!" exclaimed Zbyszko.

"Nevertheless," declared Macko, "it is as Zyndram of Maszkow said: 'Drezdenko is but the stone that causes a blind man to fall.'"

"And if the Germans should give up Drezdenko, what will happen then?"

"Then another stone will be found. But a Knight of the Cross will never give up what he has once swallowed unless you cleave his belly for it, and that, please God, we shall soon do."

"No," exclaimed Zbyszko, whose spirits were now raised, "Konrad might, perhaps, have given it up, but Ulrich will not. He is a true and stainless knight, but he is terribly headstrong."

Such was their talk, and meanwhile events were moving, like stones struck by a traveller's foot on some mountain path, which rush with ever increasing impetus towards the abyss.

Suddenly the report thundered throughout the whole land that the Knights of the Cross had attacked and seized Santok, an ancient Polish town mortgaged to the Knights of Saint John. Ulrich, the new Grand Master, who, when the Polish knights had gone to offer him their congratulations on his election, had left Marienburg on purpose to

avoid them, and who, in the earliest moments of his rule, had decreed that the German tongue, and not Latin, should henceforth be used in his relations with the King and with Poland—at length showed who and what he really was. The Pans of Krakow, who were themselves working secretly for war, now understood that Ulrich too was forcing his way headlong towards it, and that with such haughtiness and insolence as had never yet been shown towards the Polish nation by any Grand Master, even in the days when the might of the Order was greater, and that of the kingdom less, than at that moment.

The chief officers of the Order, less vehement and more crafty than Ulrich, were in communication with Prince Witold, seeking to gain him to their cause by means of gifts and flatteries so inordinate that the like had not been seen since the days when men raised temples and altars to the Roman Emperors during their lifetime. "There are but two benefactors of our Order," said the Teuton envoys, making low obeisance before the lieutenant of King Jagiello; "the first is God, and the second is Witold; wherefore every wish and every word of Witold are sacred to the Knights of the Cross." And they besought him for his judgment in the dispute concerning Drezdenko, believing that if he, a subject of the King, should take upon himself to judge his superior, Jagiello would take offence, and the friendship between them would be broken, if not for ever, at least for many a day. But as the King's councillors knew all that was being planned in Marienburg, Jagiello also chose Witold as his arbiter.

And the Order had cause to rue their choice. They imagined that they knew Witold well, but they soon learned that they did not know him sufficiently, for Witold not only adjudged Drezdenko to the Poles, well knowing what must be the issue of the quarrel, but once more raised Samogitia, and, turning an ever more menacing face towards the Order, began to increase his strength with men and arms, and with stores of corn sent from the fertile Polish lands.

And now, throughout all the regions of the Polish realm, all men understood that the decisive hour had struck at last. And so, indeed, it had.

One day, when old Macko, Zbyszko, and Jagienka were sitting before the castle gate, enjoying the warmth and

brightness of the sun, a stranger mounted on a foaming steed suddenly appeared before them, cast at the feet of the knights a sort of garland twisted of osier and willow, and shouting, "Wici! wici!*" galloped off again.

They started to their feet, their hearts throbbing wildly. Macko's face grew dark and solemn. Zbyszko rushed off to send on a mounted groom elsewhere with the "wici," and presently he returned with flashing eyes.

"War!" he exclaimed. "God has vouchsafed it at last! The war!"

"And such a war as we have never seen before!" said Macko gravely.

He shouted to the retinue, and in the twinkling of an eye they gathered round the Pans.

"Blow the horns from the tower in all directions! Let others fly to the village for the bailiffs! Lead the horses from the stables and yoke them to the waggon! And hasten! Hasten!"

Ere his voice had ceased to ring, the men had hurried off to carry out the old knight's orders. There was no difficulty, for everything—men and horses, waggon and arms, armour and provisions—had long been in readiness, so that all might mount at once and go.

"Then you will not remain at home?" said Zbyszko to his uncle before they set out.

"I? Of what are you thinking?"

"I mean that according to law you may remain, for you are old, and there would then be some protection for Jagienka and the children."

"Then, listen! Until to-day I have been waiting for this hour."

The sight of his stern, impassive face was enough to show that no persuasions would be of any avail. Moreover, in spite of his more than sixty years he was still sound as an oak, his arms moved freely in their sockets, and his hands were still able to grasp and wield an axe. True, he could no longer gallop in full armour without stirrups, but there were many younger men, especially among the Western knights, who were unable to perform that feat. But, on the other hand, he possessed great knightly training, and in the whole neighbourhood there was no more experienced warrior.

* "Wici," twigs of osier, used in the Polish army as a summons to arms.

Jagienka, however, seemed to have no fear of being left alone, for, hearing her husband's words, she rose up, and, having kissed his hand, said:

"Have no fears for me, dear Zbyszko. The castle is strong, and you know I am not over timid. Neither crossbow nor spear is unknown to me. This is no fit time to think of us. The kingdom must be saved. God will be our protector here."

Tears filled her eyes as she spoke, and ran down in great drops over her face, beautiful as a lily. She pointed to the children, and her voice trembled as she said:

"Ah! Were it not for these chicks, I would kneel at your feet and pray you to take me with you to the war."

"Jagienka!" he exclaimed, embracing her.

She encircled his neck with her arms, and clasped him to her bosom with her whole strength, repeating:

"Only come back to me, my precious one, my only one, my dearest!"

"And give thanks to God daily that He has given you such a wife," said Macko in a thick voice.

An hour afterwards the banner was lowered from the tower in token of the absence of the Pans. Zbyszko and Macko consented that Jagienka, with the children, should accompany them to Sieradz, so, after a copious meal, all set out with the retinue and the waggons.

It was a clear, calm day. The pine forests stood motionless and silent. The herds in the fields and meadows were enjoying their mid-day rest, slowly ruminating their food as if plunged in thought. The air was dry, and here and there on the highways there rose clouds of golden dust, and above the dust-clouds something could be seen glittering brightly in the sunrays like a flame. Zbyszko pointed this out to his wife and children.

"Do you know what that is that glitters above the dust-clouds?" he asked. "It is the heads of spears and pikes. Apparently the 'wici' have gone everywhere, and the people are moving from every side against the Germans."

And this was true. Not far beyond the bounds of Bogdanice they met Jagienka's brother, young Jasko of Zgorzelice, who, being a tolerably wealthy proprietor, was leading three horsemen and twenty foot soldiers.

Soon afterwards, at one of the crossways, the shaggy face of Cztan of Rogow emerged from the dust-cloud. He was no friend of the Pans of Bogdaniec, but now he called out to them from afar: "Welcome against those hounds!" and he greeted them in friendly fashion, and then galloped on again among the grey dust. They also met old Wilk of Brzozowa. Although his head trembled a little with old age, yet he too was going against the Germans to avenge the death of his son, whom they had slain in Silesia.

The nearer they approached to Sieradz the more frequent became the dust-clouds on the roads, and when at length the towers of the town appeared in the distance, the whole highway was crowded with bailiffs and armed grooms, all on their way to the place of meeting. As old Macko cast his eye over the throng of stout, robust fellows, stubborn in battle and inured to hardship, bad weather, cold and hard work more thoroughly than the men of any other nation, his heart was filled with fresh strength and the certitude of victory.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

AND the war broke out at last. At first there were but few battles, and these were hardly successful for the Poles. Before their forces had advanced the Knights of the Cross took Bobrowniki, laid Zlotorja level with the ground, and re-occupied anew the ill-fated lands of Dobrzyn, which had been regained so recently and with such pains. The intervention of the Kings of Bohemia and Hungary, however, stilled the war-storm for a time. An armistice ensued, in order that Wacław, the King of Bohemia, might adjudicate the disputes between Poland and the Teutonic Order.

But the two sides did not cease from collecting troops and advancing them towards each other during the winter and spring months; so that, when the Bohemian King, bribed by the Order, gave judgment in its favour, the war must needs break forth anew.

Meanwhile summer came, and with it came the forces of Prince Witold. After passing the river at Czerwiesk, the two armies united with the troops of the Mazovian princes. In the camp at Swiec on the other side there lay a hundred thousand iron-clad Germans. The King wished to cross the Drweca and go by the shortest way to Marienburg, but when that was seen to be impossible he turned aside from Kurzetnik to Dzialdowo and, after capturing the Teutonic castle of Dabrowno—known otherwise as Gilgenburg—he encamped there.

The King, as well as the Polish and Lithuanian leaders, knew that a pitched battle must be fought soon, although no one anticipated that it would come to that for several days. They concluded that the Grand Master, having crossed the King's path, meant to rest his troops, so that they should appear in the field fresh and not exhausted. The King's troops took up their quarters for the night in Dabrowno. The capture of this fortress, although it had been effected without the order, and

even against the will, of the war council, filled the hearts of the King and of Prince Witold with hope, for it was a strong castle surrounded by a lake, and had thick walls and a numerous garrison. Yet the Polish knights had taken it almost in the twinkling of an eye, and with such headlong enthusiasm, that before the whole of the Polish forces had arrived the town and the castle had been transformed into ruins and smouldering heaps, amid which the wild warriors of Witold and the Tartars under the command of Saladin put to the edge of the sword the remnant of the German soldiers, who fought desperately for their lives.

The conflagration did not last long, for it was extinguished by a short but violent shower of rain. The whole night of the 15th July was strangely changeable and boisterous. One storm after another broke over the camp. At certain moments the whole sky was red with lightning, and the thunder rolled with terrible peals from east to west. At times the thunderbolts filled the air with the smell of sulphur; at times the noise of the rain drowned all other sounds. Presently the clouds were scattered by the wind, and, amid the shreds of them, the stars and the great, bright moon were once more visible. It was only after midnight that it became somewhat calm, and that it was possible for the fires to be kindled. And immediately thousands and thousands of them blazed out throughout the vast Polish-Lithuanian camp, and by their glow the warriors dried their drenched clothes, singing battle songs the while.

The King, too, was awake. In a house situated at the farther end of the encampment, where he had sought shelter from the storm, the war council sat listening to the reports of the taking of Gilgenburg. As the Sieradz troops had taken part in the attack, their commander, Jakob of Koniecpole, was summoned along with others to justify himself for storming the town without orders, and for not desisting although the King sent an officer and some grooms to restrain him.

Fearing that censure or even punishment might await him, the Palatine of Sieradz took with him several of the chief knights, and among them old Macko and Zbyszko, as witnesses to testify that the King's officer had reached them only when the troops had already scaled the walls of the castle, and when the fight for the garrison was at

its hottest. When taxed with assaulting the castle, he declared that it was difficult to make inquiry concerning everything when the troops extended over several miles. Having been sent as an outpost, he understood it to be his duty to destroy all obstacles to the King's troops, and to strike the foe wherever he should meet him. Upon hearing his defence, the King, Prince Witold, and the lords, who were in their hearts glad of what had occurred, not only did not blame the Palatine and his men for their action, but praised their vigour and bravery in so quickly mastering the castle and its garrison.

Macko and Zbyszko now beheld the greatest men of the kingdom, for, besides the King and the Mazovian princes, there were also present the two commanders-in-chief, Witold, who led the Lithuanians, Samogitians, Ruthenians, Bessarabians, Roumanians, and Tartars; and Zyndram of Maszkow, the Sword-bearer of Krakow and commander of the Polish army, who excelled all men in his knowledge of warfare. With these there were in the council many other great warriors and statesmen, the youngest being Ziemowit, son of the Prince of Plock, who, in spite of his years, was wonderfully experienced in war, and whose opinion was highly valued by the great King himself. And in the spacious chamber adjoining many famous knights were in waiting, in order to give their counsel if it should be asked. Many of them knew Macko and Zbyszko, and among them was their trusty old friend Powala of Taczew. They greeted Macko and his nephew heartily, and began at once to talk with them of old times and adventures.

"Ah!" said the Pan of Taczew to Zbyszko, "your account against the Knights of the Cross is assuredly heavy, but I hope you will now make them pay for everything."

"I will—in blood!" answered Zbyszko. "In blood they shall pay us all!"

"Do you know that your Kuno von Lichtenstein is now Grand Komthur?" asked Paszko of Biskupice.

"I know, and so does my uncle."

"Heaven grant that I meet him!" exclaimed Macko, "for I have pressing business with him."

"We also challenged him," said Powala, "but he answered that his office did not permit him to fight. But now his office will certainly permit it."

Zawisza the Black, who was accustomed to speak with great gravity, said :

"He will fall to whomsoever God has allotted him!"

Out of mere curiosity Zbyszko submitted the case of his uncle to the judgment of Zawisza, asking whether Macko's vow had not been accomplished by the fact that he had fought and slain a relative of Lichtenstein who had offered himself in Kuno's stead. With one accord all the knights present exclaimed that that sufficed. But the stern-hearted Macko, although pleased with the judgment, said :

"Nevertheless, I should feel surer of my salvation had I met Kuno himself."

They then spoke of the capture of Gilgenburg and of the great battle which they all expected soon. Just as they were discussing how many days would probably pass before the encounter, a tall, thin knight, dressed in red cloth and wearing on his head a red cap, entered. Stretching out his arms, he exclaimed in a soft, almost womanly, voice :

"Greetings to you, Knight Zbyszko of Bogdaniec!"

"De Lorche!" cried Zbyszko. "So you are here!"

He embraced the Lorrainer, for he retained a kind remembrance of him, and asked him eagerly :

"So you are here? On our side?"

"There may be many knights of Geldern with the Germans," answered de Lorche, "but I owe service for the fief of Dlugolas to my lord, Prince Janusz."

"Then you are the heir of old Mikolaj of Dlugolas?"

"Yes. On the death of Mikolaj and of his son, who was slain at Bobrowniki, the estates fell to the beautiful Agnieszka of Dlugolas, who for five years has been my wife and lady."

"By heaven!" exclaimed Zbyszko; "tell me how you achieved that."

But de Lorche, having greeted old Macko, said :

"Your former groom, Hlawa, told me I should find you here, and he is now in my tent attending to the supper. It is some distance off, at the farther end of the camp, but we shall get there on horseback quickly enough, so pray come with me."

He turned to Powala, with whom he had become acquainted in the old days at Plock, and added :

"And you also, noble Pan. To me you will give happiness and honour."

"Good!" answered Powala. "It is pleasure to talk with old friends, and on our way we shall be able to examine the camp."

They went out to mount their horses and go. Before they started, however, de Lorche's servant threw over their shoulders rain-cloaks, which he had evidently brought purposely. The servant approached Zbyszko, kissed his hand, and said:

"Greetings and honour to you, Pan! I am your old servant, but in the darkness you cannot recognise me. Do not you remember me—Sanderus?"

"By heaven!" exclaimed Zbyszko.

And for a time there rose up in his heart memories of past sorrow, pain, and misfortune, just as when, a fortnight before, on joining the King's army with the troops of the Mazovian princes, he had met his trusty groom, Hlawa, after a long separation.

"Sanderus!" he said at length. "Ah! I remember the old days, and you too. Where have you been since then, and what have you been about? Do you still carry relics?"

"No, Pan. Until last spring I was sacristan of the church at Dlugolas. But my late father was engaged in military craft, and so, when the war broke out, I grew sick of the brazen church bells, and in my soul there awoke a fondness for iron and steel."

"What is this I hear?" said Zbyszko, who was unable to imagine Sanderus going forth to battle with a sword, a spear, or an axe.

"A year ago," said Sanderus, holding Zbyszko's stirrup, "I was sent on a mission to Prussia by the Bishop of Plock, and in this I rendered valuable service. But that I will narrate later. Meanwhile, be pleased to mount, your Grace, for the Bohemian count, whom they call Hlawa, awaits you with supper in the tent of my lord."

Zbyszko mounted and, approaching de Lorche, rode along by his side so that he might talk with him freely, for he was curious concerning his history.

"I am glad beyond measure," he said, "that you are on our side. And yet I am surprised, for you served under the Knights of the Cross."

"Those serve them who are paid to serve," replied de Lorche, "but I never took pay from them. No. I went among the Knights of the Cross merely to seek adventures

and to win a knight's belt, and that, as you know, I have now won from the hands of a Polish prince. But having lived many years in their land, I learned on which side lay the right. Then, when I married and settled here, how could I be against you? I am already a Pole. See how I have learned your language. Indeed, I have begun to forget the German tongue."

"And your estates in Geldern? I have heard that you are a relative of the sovereign counts of Geldern, and are there the heir to many castles and estates."

"My heritage there I made over to a relative, who purchased it. Five years ago I went thither and brought back much wealth, and with that I purchased estates in Mazovia."

"And how came it that you married Agnieszka of Dlugolas?"

"Ah!" answered de Lorche, "who can gauge the mind of a woman? She was constantly jeering at me, until, having suffered enough of that, I told her that, for very sorrow, I would go off to the war in Asia and never come back again. Then she suddenly burst into tears and exclaimed: 'Then I will become a nun!' Thereupon I fell at her feet, and a fortnight later the Bishop of Plock blessed us in church."

"And have you children?"

"When the war is over," said de Lorche, with a sigh, "Agnieszka intends to go to the tomb of Queen Jadwiga to invoke her blessing."

"That is well. They say that is a sure remedy, and that in such matters there is no better patroness than our holy Queen. The decisive battle will be fought in a few days, and then there will be peace."

"Ah!"

"But," said Zbyszko presently, "The Knights of the Cross must surely hold you for a traitor?"

"No," answered de Lorche. "You know that I practise knightly honour. When Sanderus went to Marienburg with a mission from the Bishop of Plock, I sent by him a letter to the Grand Master Ulrich, and therein I renounced my services to him and stated the reasons why I now stand on your side."

"Ha! Sanderus!" exclaimed Zbyszko. "He has told me that he grew tired of the brass of the bells, and that a liking for iron had awakened in him. At this I wonder, for he had ever the heart of a hare."

"Sanderus," replied de Lorche, "has so far to do with steel or iron—that he shaves me and my grooms!"

"Oh, that is it!" said Zbyszko, laughing heartily.

For a time they rode on in silence. Presently de Lorche raised his eyes towards the sky and said:

"I have bidden you to supper, but ere we arrive it may be time for breakfast."

"The moon still shines," said Zbyszko. "Let us ride on."

Having overtaken Macko and Powala, they rode on, all four together, along the broad track which was always left between the tents and the camp fires, so that there might be an open passage through the camp. To reach the Mazovian troops, who were stationed at the farther end, they were obliged to traverse the whole length of the camp.

"Since Poland has been," said Macko, "there have never been such armies, for here there are men from all the ends of the earth."

"And no other King could put so many troops in the field," said de Lorche, "for none has such a mighty realm."

The old knight turned towards Powala of Taczew.

"How many banners, Pan, have come with Prince Witold?" he asked.

"Forty," answered Powala. "There are fifty detachments of our Polish troops, together with the Mazovians, but they are not so strong as those of Witold, for in his force several thousand men sometimes serve under a single banner. Ha! We heard that the Grand Master called them a rabble, fit to handle spoons rather than weapons. But it may be that it was an evil hour when he said so, for, unless I err, the Lithuanian spears will yet be terribly red with German blood."

"And those we are now passing, who are they?" asked de Lorche.

"They are the Tartars. Saladin, Witold's vassal, brought them."

"Are they good warriors?"

"The Lithuanians know how to fight them, and have conquered great numbers of them, so that they have been obliged to take part in this war. But it is difficult for Western knights to contend against them, for they are even more terrible in their flight than in an onset."

"Let us look at them more closely," said de Lorche.

And they rode on towards the burning wood piles, which were surrounded by men with arms entirely bare, but, in spite of the summer season, dressed in sheepskins with the wool turned outwards. Most of them were asleep on the bare ground, or on damp straw which steamed with the heat, but many of them sat crouching by the burning wood piles. Some essayed to shorten the night hours by singing wild songs in nasal tones, accompanying them by striking together the two shank bones of a horse, which produced a strange and disagreeable clatter; some beat upon small drums, or thrummed upon tightened bowstrings; others ate pieces of flesh, freshly snatched from the fire, smoking and bloody, blowing on them with their thick, bluish lips as they ate. Indeed, they looked so savage and malign that they might well have been taken for some fearful creatures of the forest instead of human beings. The smoke from the fires was pungent with the odour of roasting horseflesh and melting mutton fat, while round about the smell from scorched wool, heated sheepskin coats, freshly flayed hides and blood, was nauseating and unendurable. From the other side of the road, where the horses were tethered, a sweaty smell was carried by the wind. The animals, of which a few hundreds were kept for scouting in the neighbourhood, had eaten up all the grass about their feet, and were now biting at one another, snorting and shrieking shrilly from time to time. The grooms shouted at them in order to quieten them, or else whipped them into submission with their thongs of raw hide.

It was unsafe to go alone among the Tartars, for they were a wild and rapacious people. Close to them were encamped bands of Bessarabians no less wild, with the horns of animals on their heads; of long-haired Wallacians who, instead of cuirasses, wore painted wooden boards over their breasts and backs, with rude pictures of vampires, skeletons, and beasts. A little farther on was the camp of the Servians, now asleep, which, at intervals during the day, at halts between the fights, resounded like an immense lute, so many were the flutes, *balabaykas*,* bagpipes, and other musical instruments which the warriors carried with them.

The fires blazed, and through the clouds driven apart

* A kind of guitar with three strings

by the strong wind shone the rays of the big, bright moon, so that by these lights the knights were able to examine the encampment. Behind the Servians lay the unlucky Samogitians. The Germans had shed torrents of their blood, yet at every summons from Witold they rose to fight again. And now, as if conscious that their misfortunes would soon be over for ever, they had come hither, filled with the relentless spirit of their leader Skirwoillo, at whose very name the Germans trembled with awe and fury.

The fires of the Samogitians came next to those of the Lithuanians, for they were of the same people and had the same customs and language. But at the entrance of the Lithuanian camp a dismal sight met the eyes of the knights. On a gallows made of unhewn tree-trunks bound together at the top hung two bodies, turning and dangling so violently in the wind that the wood shrieked as if in pain. At the sight of the bodies, the horses started back on their haunches, and the riders piously made the sign of the cross.

"When the culprits were brought in," said Powala, when they had passed the spot, "I was at the King's side along with Prince Witold. Our bishops and lords had already complained that the Lithuanians are too savage in warfare, and that they do not even spare the churches. So when these were taken—true, they were men of importance, but they had insulted the Holy Sacrament—the Prince was so filled with wrath that it was terrible to look at him, and straightway ordered them to hang themselves. The poor wretches were then made to set up their own gallows. One was even heard to urge the other, saying: 'Hasten, hasten, or the Prince will be still more wroth with us!' All the Lithuanians and Tartars were filled with awe, for though they do not fear death they stand in terror of Witold's anger."

"Yes, I remember," said Zbyszko, "that when the King was wroth with me because of Lichtenstein, Duke Jamont, who was then by the King's side, recommended me to hang myself immediately. It was out of goodwill that he gave me that advice, though I would have challenged him to mortal combat had it not been that they were about to cut my head off, as you are aware."

"Ah! Duke Jamont has acquired knightly manners since then," said Powala.

Conversing thus they passed the great Lithuanian camp and the three splendid Ruthenian detachments, the largest of which was that of Smolensk, and entered the Polish camp. Here were fifty regiments, the flower and strength of all the army. The armour was finer, the horses bigger, and the knights better trained, being inferior in nothing to the knights of the West. In strength of limb, in endurance and hunger, cold, and hardship, the men of Great and Little Poland even excelled the Western warriors, who cared more for the comforts of life. They were simpler in their habits, their cuirasses were of ruder workmanship, although they were more finely tempered, while their contempt of death and their extraordinary stubbornness in battle had often aroused the admiration of knights from far-off lands, like the French and English.

"Here lies our whole strength and hope," said de Lorche, who was now familiar with the chivalry of Poland. "I remember how in Marienburg they used to complain that in battles with you every span of ground had to be bought with streams of blood."

"And now," said Macko, "blood will flow like a river, for never before has the Order assembled such forces."

"The Knight Korzbog," said Powala, "who carried letters from the King to the Grand Master, says the Knights of the Cross declare that neither the Roman Emperor nor any other king possesses such might, and that the Order could conquer the whole world."

"Ha! We have more men than they!" said Zbyszko.

"Yes, but they think lightly of Witold's troops, for they say they are poorly armed, and will fall in pieces at the first blow, like an earthen pot beneath a hammer. But whether this be true or not, I do not know."

"It is true, and it is not," said the prudent Macko. "Zbyszko and I know them well, for we have fought along with them. To be sure their weapons are poor, and their horses jades, so that it often happens that they give way before the onset of knights. Nevertheless they are as brave at heart, and even braver, than the Germans."

"It will soon be proved," said Powala. "The King weeps constantly at the thought that so much Christian blood must be shed, and even at the last moment he would be ready to conclude a just peace, but to that the pride of the Knights of the Cross will not allow them to assent."

"It is true," said Macko. "I know the Knights of the Cross, as do all of you! God has already prepared the balance in which the blood of us and of the enemies of our race shall be weighed!"

They had almost reached the Mazovian bands where stood the tent of de Lorche, when in the middle of the road before them they came upon a crowd of men looking at the sky.

"Halt, there! Halt!" called a voice from among the gazers.

"Who is it that speaks, and what do you here?" asked Powala.

"I am the parson of Klobuck. And you?"

"Powala of Taczew, the Knights of Bogdaniec and Pan de Lorche."

"Ah, it is you, Pan!" said the priest in a mysterious voice, as he approached Powala's horse. "Look at the moon, and see how strange it is. Truly this is a wonderful and prophetic night."

The knights raised their eyes and looked at the moon, which had grown pale and was already near its setting.

"I can discern nothing," said Powala. "What is it that you see?"

"A monk in a hood is fighting with a king wearing a crown! Look! There! In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! How terribly they wrestle! God have mercy upon us sinners!"

There was silence all around, for all men held their breath.

"Look! look!" exclaimed the priest.

"True, there is something!" cried Macko.

"True! true!" said the others confirmatively.

"Ha!" exclaimed the parson of Klobuck suddenly. "The king has thrown the monk to the ground! He has set his foot on him! Jesus Christ be praised!"

"For ever and ever!"

At this moment a big black cloud obscured the moon, and the night grew dark except for the light of the fires that trembled in bloody bands across the road.

The knights rode on, and when they had left the crowd behind, Powala asked:

"Did you see anything?"

"At first I saw nothing," answered Macko, "but afterwards I distinctly saw both the king and the monk."

"I also."

"And I."

"It is a sign from Heaven," said Powala. "It would seem, then, that in spite of the tears of our King there must be battle."

"And such a battle," said Macko, "as the world does not remember."

They rode on in silence, their hearts oppressed and overflowing.

As they neared the tent of de Lorche the wind rose with such violence that in the twinkling of an eye it scattered the fires of the Mazovians before it. Thousands of firebrands, blazing chips and sparks flew through the air, accompanied by dense clouds of smoke.

"Ha! How terribly it blows!" said Zbyszko, adjusting the rain-cloak which the wind had blown over his head.

"And in the storm one seems to hear the sound of groans and weeping."

"The dawn will soon break," said de Lorche, "but what the day will bring forth who can tell?"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

At daybreak not only did the wind not cease, but it increased to such an extent that it was found to be impossible to pitch the tent in which the King had been accustomed to hear Holy Mass thrice every day since the beginning of the expedition. At length Witold, who was anxious that the march should not be impeded, approached with the request that divine service should be deferred until they reached the recesses of the forest, when both time and place would be more fitting. The Prince's wish was readily complied with, the more so as it was really impossible to do otherwise.

At sunrise the whole of the troops set out in a single body, a long train of baggage waggons bringing up the rear. After an hour's march the wind fell a little, so that it was possible to display the banners. As if strewn with many-coloured blossoms, the fields were soon covered with them as far as the eye could reach. But no eye could compass all the forces, or command the forest of variegated standards under which the different regiments moved forward. That of the province of Krakow advanced under a red banner bearing a white eagle crowned, and this was the chief banner of the whole kingdom, the great standard of all the troops. It was borne by Marcin of Wrocimowice, whose coat of arms was "Polkozy," a knight mighty and famous throughout the world. It was followed by the Court regiments, one of which marched beneath the double cross of Lithuania, while the emblem of the other was a pursuing horseman with a sword raised ready to strike. Under the standard of St. George marched the mighty arrays of mercenaries and foreign volunteers, who consisted mainly of Bohemians and Moravians. Of these, a great number were taking part in the war, and the forty-ninth detachment was entirely composed of them. These men—particularly in the infantry, who followed the

spear-men—were exceedingly wild and unruly, but so well trained were they to battle, and so implacable in an encounter, that every other infantry, on coming into contact with them, started back hastily from their touch, as a dog starts back before the touch of a hedgehog. Their arms were halberds, scythes, axes, and, more especially, iron flails, in the wielding of which they were so terrible. They hired themselves to any one who would pay them, for their whole life consisted of war, pillage, and slaughter.

By the side of the Moravians and Bohemians marched under their own standards sixteen detachments from the Polish provinces—one from Przemyśl, one from Lemberg, one from Halicz, and three from Podole—while behind them came the infantry from the same provinces, armed for the most part with spears and scythes. The Mazovian princes, Janusz and Ziemowit, led the twenty-first, twenty-second, and twenty-third detachments. Behind these marched the regiments of the bishops and nobles, numbering twenty-two in all. There were also the bands of Jasko of Tarnow, Jendrek of Tenczyn, Spytko Leliwa, Krzon of Ostow, Mikolaj of Michalowo, Zbygniew of Brzezic, Krzon of Koziełowy, Kuba of Koniecpole, Jasko Ligeza, of the Kmita and the Zaklika, as well as the clans of the Gryfits and Bobowskis, the detachments of Kozle Rogi, and several others who in time of war assembled under a common banner and shouted the same battle cry.

The whole earth seemed to blossom beneath them, as meadows blossom in spring. Horses and men moved onward like the waves of the sea, over their heads a forest of lances with coloured streamers, that looked in the distance like flowers, and in the rear, amid dense clouds of dust, came the townspeople and the peasant footmen. They knew that the struggle to which they were advancing would be terrible, but they also knew that it was necessary, and so it was with willing hearts that they went on.

The legions of Prince Witold advanced on the right wing under banners of different colours, but bearing the same device, that of the knight with the sword threateningly raised to strike. On they went through fields and forests, their line of march stretching for several miles, so that the eye could not embrace their whole extent at once.

Just before noon the troops approached the villages of Logdau and Tannenberg, and halted on the border of a

forest. The spot seemed suitable as a resting-place, for it was protected against sudden attack by the enemy. On the left the ground was washed by the waters of Lake Dabrowa, and on the right by those of Lake Lubicz, while in front a great stretch of open field extended for several miles. In the midst of the track, which rose gently towards the west, lay the meadows of Grünwald, and a little distance off the thatched roofs and the dull fallow lands of Tannenberg. It would be easy to perceive any enemy who should descend from the heights towards the forest, but the Poles did not anticipate that there could be any encounter before the following day. It was therefore merely in order that the troops might enjoy a little rest that the army was brought to a halt; but as that experienced warrior, Zyndram of Maszkow, had enforced the preservation of the order of battle even during the march, it was possible for the men to encamp so as to be ready to fight at a moment's notice. While couriers, mounted on light and swift horses were despatched towards Grünwald and Tannenberg, and even further, in order to explore the neighbourhood, the King, who was longing for divine service, hastened the erection of the chapel-tent on the high shore of Lake Lubicz, that he might hear the customary masses.

Jagiello, King Witold, the Mazovian princes, and the military council made their way to the tent. The foremost of the knights assembled in front of the entrance, either in order to commend themselves to the mercy of God before the day of battle, or to look upon the King. Jagiello entered, clad in his coarse grey camp dress, his grave face plainly indicating the grievous anxiety that oppressed him. Time had altered his form but little; it had neither covered his face with wrinkles nor whitened his hair, which he was still in the habit of throwing behind his ears with the same quick motion of the hand as in the days when Zbyszko had seen him for the first time in Krakow. But he walked as if bowed down beneath a burden of terrible responsibility that weighed upon his shoulders, as if sunk in some great sorrow. Among the troops it was said that the King wept continually at the thought of the Christian blood that must be shed, and it was true. Jagiello recoiled before war, but especially before a war which must be waged against men who bore the cross upon their mantles and their banners, and with

his whole soul he longed for peace. It was in vain that the Polish lords, and even Scibor and Gara, the Hungarian mediators, assured him that the Grand Master Ulrich was so consumed with Teutonic insolence and pride that he was ready to set the world at defiance; it was in vain that his own envoy, Piotr Korzbog, swore by the Holy Cross and by the fishes in his coat of arms that the Order would not listen to peace, and that Count von Wende, the Komthur of Gniew, the one member of the Order who spoke in favour of it, was covered with sneers and insults by the others—he hoped still, in spite of everything, that his enemy would yet recognise the justice of his claims, and, by closing their terrible quarrel by an equitable treaty, spare human blood.

It was therefore for this reason also that he went to pray in the chapel, for his simple and benevolent soul was tormented with an immense uneasiness. In past days Jagiello had devastated Teutonic lands with fire and sword, but he had done so as a heathen prince of Lithuania. But now, as a Christian and a King, when he beheld burning villages, ruined houses, blood and tears, he was filled with the fear of God's anger, the more so as he knew that it was as yet but the beginning of strife. It was true that his enemies were unscrupulous, but they bore the cross on their mantles and were protected by such great and sacred relics that the mind shrank before them in awe. The whole army thought of them with terror; it was not of spears, or swords, or axes that the Polish warriors were afraid, but only of the relics. "How raise a hand against the Grand Master," even the most dauntless knights used to say, "when he bears on his cuirass a reliquary containing the bones of saints and a piece of the wood of the Saviour's cross?" Witold, it was true, was burning with the lust of war; but at the thought of the divine influences with which the Order cloaked its wickedness, the pious heart of the King trembled with fear.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

FATHER BARTOSZ of Klobuck had just finished one mass, Jarosz, the parson of Kalisz, was about to begin another, and the King had gone out in front of the tent in order to rest his knees, which were somewhat weary with kneeling, when a nobleman named Hanko Ostojczyk galloped up like a whirlwind, his horse foaming at the mouth, and, without waiting to leap from his saddle, exclaimed :

"The Germans! Your Majesty!—they are coming!"

At these words the knights started and the King's face changed; for a moment he remained silent.

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" he exclaimed at length. "Where did you see them? How many regiments have they?"

"I saw one detachment at Grünwald," answered Hanko breathlessly, "but from behind the hill there rose a great cloud of dust, as if many more were advancing."

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" repeated the King.

Hereupon Witold, into whose face all the blood seemed to rush at the first words of Hanko, and whose eyes now glowed like burning coals, turned hastily towards the courtiers.

"Put off the second mass!" he cried. "A horse for me!"

But the King laid his hand on the prince's shoulder.

"Go you, brother," he said; "I will remain and hear the second mass."

Witold and Zyndram of Maszkow leaped on their horses, but just as they turned towards the encampment a second courier, the nobleman Piotr Oksza of Wlostow, rushed in, shouting while still in the distance :

"The Germans! The Germans! I have seen two regiments!"

"To horse! to horse!" shouted the courtiers and the knights.

Piotr had not ceased speaking, when again the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard, and a third messenger galloped up, followed speedily by a fourth, a fifth, and a sixth. All had seen bands of Germans approaching in ever increasing numbers. It could no longer be doubted that the entire might of the Teutonic Order was advancing to the attack.

In the twinkling of an eye each knight rode off to his detachment. Only a few courtiers, priests, and grooms remained at the chapel-tent with the King. Presently a bell sounded to signify that the parson of Kalisz was about to begin the second mass. Jagiello stretched out his arms, clasped his hands devoutly, and, raising his eyes to heaven, walked slowly into the tent.

When the King came out in front of the tent after the second mass he could see with his own eyes that the couriers had spoken truly, for away on the confines of the great plain a dark mass was visible, as if a forest had suddenly sprung up over the desert fields, while over the forest the sunrays glittered and flashed amid the ever moving colours of a stream of banners. Still further off, beyond Grünwald and Tannenberg, an immense dust-cloud rose towards the sky. The King cast his eye over the threatening horizon. Then, turning towards the reverend vice-chancellor Mikolaj, he asked:

"Who is the saint to-day?"

"It is the day of the Going forth of the Apostles," answered the vice-chancellor.

The King sighed.

"So the Day of the Apostles," he said, "will be the last for many thousands of Christians who will meet each other on that field."

And with his hand he indicated the great desert plain, broken only in the centre, half-way towards Tannenberg, by a clump of oaks that had grown there for centuries.

Meanwhile, however, the King's horse was led up, and at a short distance came sixty spearmen, sent by Zyndram of Maszkow as the royal bodyguard.

King Jagiello's bodyguard was commanded by Alexander, the younger son of the Prince of Plock, and brother of that Ziemowit who, because of his peculiar ability in warfare, had been given a seat in the military council. The second in command was Zygmunt Korybut, a Lithu-

anian nephew of the King, a youth of great promise and destiny, but of restless spirit. Chief among the knights were Jasko Mezyk of Dabrowa, a veritable giant, in stature nearly equal even to Paszko of Biskupice, and in strength but little inferior to Zawisza the Black; Zolawa, a Bohemian baron, small and slender, but exceedingly dexterous, celebrated at the courts of Bohemia and Hungary for his combats, in which he had laid low a score of Austrian knights; Sokol, also a Bohemian, unequalled as a bowman; Bieniasz Wierusz of Great Poland, Peter of Milan, the Lithuanian lord, Sienko of Pohost, whose father, Piotr, commanded one of the Smolensk regiments, Duke Fieduszko, a relative of the King, and Duke Jamont, while the remainder were Polish knights "chosen from among thousands." All had sworn to defend the King to the last drop of their blood, and to avert from his person every peril of war. By Jagiello's side were the reverend vice-chancellor Mikolaj, and the royal secretary, Zbygniew of Olesnica, a learned youth, skilled in the art of reading and writing, yet at the same time strong as a boar. The King's armour was borne by three grooms, Czajka of Nowy-Dwor, Mikolaj of Morawica, and Danilko, a Ruthenian, who carried the royal crossbow and quiver. The King's following was completed by a score of courtiers, mounted on swift horses, whose duty it was to hasten with orders to the troops.

The grooms arrayed the King in a magnificent suit of glittering armour, and led up his horse, a chestnut, also "chosen from among thousands." The creature snorted beneath its steel head-piece, as if giving expression to a good omen, and, filling the air with its neighing, reared a little, somewhat like a bird preparing to fly. As soon as he felt the horse beneath him and a spear in his hand, the King's demeanour suddenly changed. His careworn look vanished, his small, black eyes glistened, and a flush suffused his cheeks. But this was only for a moment. As the vice-chancellor made the sign of the cross over him he once more grew grave, and humbly bowed his head encased in its glistening helm.

Meanwhile the German army slowly descended the slope, and, passing Grünwald and Tannenberg, halted in full battle array in the midst of the plain. From the Polish camp beneath, a terrible wall of mounted knights in

armour could be plainly seen. Notwithstanding the wind which swayed the banners, a quick eye might discern the various devices with which they were embroidered, such as crosses, eagles, griffins, swords, helmets, lambs, and the heads of bison and bears.

Old Macko and Zbyszko, who had previously engaged in war against the Knights of the Cross, and therefore knew their troops and their devices, pointed out to the men of Sieradz two regiments of the Grand Master himself composed of the flower of the Teutonic chivalry; another, the chief detachment of the whole Order, commanded by Friedrich von Wallenrod; and the mighty standard of Saint George with a red cross on a white ground, as well many other banners of the Order. But they did not know the ensigns of the foreign guests, of whom thousands had come from every land—from Austria, Bavaria, Swabia, and Switzerland, from Burgundy, famous for its knight-hood, from wealthy Flanders, from sunny France, whose knights, as Macko once declared, would still utter gallant words even when stretched vanquished on the earth; from England beyond the sea, the land that bore the finest bowmen in the world; and even from distant Spain, where, in ceaseless struggles with the Saracens, honour and bravery had flourished as in no other land.

The blood rushed through the veins of the sturdy noblemen from the neighbourhood of Sieradz, from Koniecpole, Krzesnia, Bogdaniec, Rogow, Brzozowa, and other Polish lands, at the thought that in a moment they would be at close quarters with the Germans and all the splendid chivalry in the Order's service. The faces of the older men grew grave and stern, for they knew how arduous and terrible the work would be. But the hearts of the younger men began to whine, as hounds whine when, held back by the leash, they see their quarry from afar. Some of them grasped their spears, their sword hilts, or the helms of their axes more firmly, and reined in their horses as if to let them dash forward suddenly; others panted, as if oppressed by their cuirasses. But the more experienced knights essayed to calm their ardour, saying:

"You will miss nothing, never fear! There will be enough for all—God grant only that there be not too much!"

The Knights of the Cross, looking down upon the plain from the height, saw on the borders of the forest but a

score of Polish regiments, and were by no means certain whether these constituted the whole of the King's army. It is true that to the left, near the lake, some grey bands of warriors could be distinguished, while among the bushes something could be seen glittering like the heads of the light spears used by the Lithuanians. This, however, might well be but a large scouting party of Poles. Presently some refugees from devastated Gilgenburg, a score of whom were brought before the Grand Master, testified that all the Polish-Lithuanian forces lay before him.

But it was in vain that they spoke of their strength. The Grand Master would not listen to them, for since the beginning of the war he had shut his ears to everything except that which seemed favourable to him and portended certain victory. He sent out no scouts or spies, for he believed that a pitched battle was inevitable, and that such a battle could not end otherwise than in the complete overthrow of the enemy. Confiding in a force such as no Grand Master had ever taken into the field before, he was led to underrate the strength of his foe, so that when the Komthur of Gnieuw, who had been making inquiries on his own account, represented to him that the troops of Jagiello were really the more numerous, he answered: "What manner of troops are they? With the Poles alone we shall have a little trouble; but as for the rest, they are a despicable pack—better at handling a spoon than a weapon!"

As he advanced with all his forces his face kindled with joy, for as he examined the enemy before him he distinguished against the dark backgrounds of the forest the red folds of the standard of the Polish kingdom, so that he could no longer doubt that he was face to face with the chief troops of Jagiello.

The Germans, however, were unable to attack the Poles stationed in and about the forest, for the knights of the Order were redoubtable only in the open field, and did not love—nor, indeed, did they know how—to fight in woods and thickets.

Some of them therefore assembled hastily at Ulrich's side, so that they might deliberate as to how the enemy should be drawn from their shelter.

"By Saint George!" exclaimed the Grand Master. "We have ridden ten miles without resting; the heat plagues

us, and our bodies are bathed in sweat beneath the weight of our armour. Are we then to wait here until it shall please the enemy to come forth into the open?"

Hereupon the Count von Wende, a man respected on account of his age and experience, spoke:

"Although my words have been ridiculed here already," he said, "and ridiculed by men who may yet fly from the field which I will never leave alive" (here he looked at Werner von Tetlingen), "nevertheless I will speak that which my conscience and my love for the Order command me to say. The Poles do not lack courage, but their King, as I well know, still hopes for messengers of peace even at this moment."

Werner von Tetlingen said nothing in reply, but merely snorted out a contemptuous laugh. The Grand Master, who was displeased with von Wende's words, said:

"Have we now time to think of peace? It is with other business that we must deal."

"For God's business there is always time," answered von Wende.

But Heinrich, the cruel Komthur of Czluchow, who had sworn to have two virgin swords carried before him that he might imbrue them with Polish blood, turned his fat, perspiring face towards Ulrich, and with fierce anger exclaimed:

"I prefer death to ignominy, and with these swords I will attack the whole Polish army alone!"

Ulrich slightly knit his brows.

"You speak contrary to discipline," said he. Then, turning to the other komthurs, he added: "Deliberate only by what means we are to draw the enemy from the forest."

Each expressed his opinion, but at length the counsel of Gersdorf was approved by the komthurs and the foremost of the foreign knights, namely, that two heralds should be sent to the King with the announcement that the Grand Master sent him two swords and challenged the Poles to deadly battle, and that, if they had not field enough, the Grand Master would be willing to withdraw a little with his army, in order that they might have more fighting room.

The King had just ridden from the shore of the lake and was about to make his way towards the left wing of the Polish bands, where he was to dub a large number of

knights, when he was suddenly informed that two heralds were approaching from the German army.

Jagiello's heart beat high with hope.

"It may be that they come with proposals for a just peace," he said.

"May God grant it!" answered the priests.

The King sent for Witold, and meanwhile the heralds slowly made their way towards the camp.

They could be plainly seen in the bright sunlight, as they rode onwards on their great caparisoned chargers. One of them bore on his shield the black Imperial eagle on a golden field, while the other, who was the herald of the Duke of Stettin, displayed a griffin on a white ground. The Polish ranks opened to receive them, and, alighting from their horses, they speedily appeared before the King. Slightly bowing their heads by way of reverence, they proceeded to the accomplishment of their mission.

"Sire," said the first herald, "the Grand Master Ulrich challenges your Majesty and the Prince Witold to battle, and in order to excite the courage which you appear to lack he sends you these two naked swords."

With these words he laid the swords at the King's feet.

Jasko Mezyk of Dabrowa translated his words, and as soon as he had finished, the herald who bore the griffin on his shield stepped forward.

"The Grand Master Ulrich," he said, "bade me also declare to you, sire, that if you have not enough ground for battle he will withdraw a little, so that you may not remain idle in the brushwood."

Jasko Mezyk again interpreted the speech, which was followed by a long silence. Many of the knights ground their teeth at the arrogance and insult of the message.

The last hopes of King Jagiello vanished like smoke. He had looked for an embassy that would bring about peace and concord, but instead of this the message was one that breathed forth pride and war. Therefore, raising his weeping eyes to heaven, he answered:

"Of swords we have enough; yet these also I accept, but as a presage of victory sent me by God Himself through your hands. The field of battle He will appoint also. To His justice I appeal; to Him I prefer my complaint for the wrongs done to my people through your wickedness and pride—Amen!"

Two great tears rolled down his sunburnt cheeks.

Meanwhile the knights in the royal suite began to exclaim :

"The Germans are withdrawing! See, they are making way for us!"

The heralds rode back again, and in a short time they were seen mounting the hill on their huge horses, the silk which they wore over their armour causing their forms to shine brilliantly in the sunlight.

The Polish troops issued from the forest and the brushwood in excellent battle array. In the van marched the so-called "front body," composed of the most redoubtable knights; behind them came the main body, and lastly the foot soldiers and mercenaries. Thus, two long lanes separated the divisions, and in these open spaces Prince Witold and Zyndram of Maszkow rode hastily to and fro. The former was without a helm on his head, and in his resplendent armour he resembled some evil-boding meteor or a flame driven before the wind.

The knights drew a deep breath, and settled themselves firmly in their saddles.

The battle was about to begin.

The Grand Master stood watching the royal troops as they marched forth from the forest.

For a long time he gazed at their immense mass, at their wings spread out like the pinions of some gigantic bird, at the rainbow of banners that fluttered in the wind, and suddenly his heart was oppressed by a strange and terrible feeling. It may be that with the eyes of his soul he beheld heaps of dead bodies and rivers of blood. It may be that he, who was without fear of man, was awakened to the fear of God, who in the heights of heaven held the scales of victory.

For the first time it flashed through his mind how terrible that day must be; for the first time he felt how heavy was the responsibility he had taken on his shoulders.

Therefore his face grew pale, his lips quivered, and tears flowed freely from his eyes, so that the komthurs looked at their chief with astonishment.

"What is it that grieves you, your Grace?" asked the Count von Wende.

"It is, indeed, a fitting moment for tears!" said Heinrich, the fierce Komthur of Czluchow.

Even the Grand Komthur, Kuno von Lichtenstein, puffed out his lips and exclaimed:

"Master, I do openly blame you, for you ought to think of raising the spirits of the knights, instead of depressing them. Indeed, we were wont to see you in quite another mood."

But in spite of all his efforts the tears continued to roll down the black beard of the Grand Master, as if some one not himself were weeping within him.

At length, however, he controlled himself a little, and, turning his stern eyes upon the komthurs, exclaimed:

"To your detachments!"

Each one dashed at once towards his command, for Ulrich had spoken with decision.

As for him, he stretched out his hand towards his groom and said: "My helm!"

Although the trumpets had not yet sounded for battle, the hearts of the men on both sides were already beating like hammers.

There was an interval of suspense more trying, perhaps, than the stress of battle itself. The peasants of the neighbourhood had climbed the old oaks that stood between the two armies, towards Tannenberg, in order that they might see the struggle about to be waged between forces such as had not been brought together for generations. But for this solitary clump of trees the whole field was bare, grey, and cheerless, like a great desolate prairie. Only the wind moved over its surface, while above seemed to hover the dread presence of Death. Involuntarily the knights turned their eyes towards the silent, ominous plain. From time to time the sun was veiled by the clouds as they hastened across the sky, and at such moments a deathly gloom settled over the land.

Suddenly the wind began to rise. It roared through the forest, tearing away thousands of leaves in its course; it rushed headlong over the plain, bending the dry blades of grass before it, and, raising clouds of dust, whirled them into the eyes of the Teutonic troops. At this moment the air rang with the shrill sound of horns and pipes, and the whole Lithuanian wing dashed forward like an enormous

flock of birds that had just taken wing. They bounded madly onward, as was their wont. The horses stretched out their necks, lowered their ears, and flew on with all their might; their riders brandished their swords and spears as, with terrific clamour, they rode against the left wing of the Knights of the Cross.

It was here that the Grand Master stood just at this moment. He had recovered from his emotion, and now, instead of tears, his eyes seemed to give forth sparks of fire. Seeing the swarm of Lithuanians advancing like a whirlwind, he turned to Friedrich Wallenrod, who commanded the wing, and said:

“Witold has begun! Now you!—on!—in God’s name!”

And, beckoning with his right hand, he ordered forward fourteen detachments of knights clad in armour.

“God with us!” shouted Wallenrod.

The detachments lowered their spears and began their advance at a walk. But as a rock rolled down a mountain-side gains ever greater speed as it falls, so they from a foot-pace passed into a trot, and from a trot into a gallop, until, terrible and irresistible, they rushed on like some mighty avalanche which must crush and dash in pieces everything that it encounters.

The earth trembled and groaned beneath them.

The battle seemed about to extend and kindle over the whole line, and now the Polish bands began to sing the old war hymn of Saint Wojcieche. A hundred thousand heads encased in iron were raised upwards, and from a hundred thousand breasts came forth one gigantic voice like a mighty roll of thunder:

“Mother of God, O Holy Virgin!
Mary, glorified of Heaven!
Beloved Mother—Merciful!
Of Thy Son, our Lord, obtain us
Pardon of our sins!
Kyrie eleison!”

And immediately strength entered into their bones, and their hearts grew ready for death. In the hymn and in the voices there seemed to be some great, impetuous, victorious force; it was as if the thunder had indeed begun to roll across the sky. The spears shook in the hands of the knights, the banners and flags quivered in the breeze, the air trembled, the branches waved among

the trees, and in the recesses of the forest the echoes awakened by the song seemed to repeat to the lakes, to the meadows, and far and wide to the whole earth.

“Pardon of our sins!
Kyrie eleison!”

And they sang on :

“This is Thy holy day!
Listen to our voice ; fill Thou the minds of men !
Give ear unto our prayer ! Oh, hearken !
Move Him, Thy Son, to grant our supplication :
A holy life on earth give unto us,
And after death a place in paradise !
Kyrie eleison !”

The echo repeated in answer : “Kyrie eleiso-o-on !”

Meanwhile, stubborn combat had begun to rage on the right wing, and was rapidly approaching the centre.

The clangour of the fight, the neighing of the horses, and the fierce shouting of the men, mingled with the strains of the hymn. But there were moments when the shouting ceased, as if their breath had failed the combatants, and then the voices were again heard thundering :

“Adam, thou husbandman of God,
Who sittest in the heavenly courts !
Take us, Thy children, to those realms
Where holy angels ever dwell !
Where there is ever love and gladness,
Where in eternal light the Maker reigns !
Kyrie eleison !”

And again the echo, “Kyrie eleiso-o-on !” resounded through the forest. The shouting towards the right wing increased still more, but no one could see or learn what was taking place, for the Grand Master, who was watching the progress of the battle from the height, at that moment launched against the Poles some twenty bands under the command of Kuno von Lichtenstein.

Zyndram of Maszkow rode like a thunderbolt to the vanguard composed of the chief Polish knights, and pointing his sword at the approaching German host, shouted so loudly that the horses in the front rank started back upon their haunches :

“On them ! Strike !”

And immediately the knights, bending forward over

their horses' necks, levelled their spears and dashed onward.

The Lithuanians bent beneath the terrible onrush of the Germans. The foremost ranks, composed of the best armed and most important bojars, were soon levelled with the ground. The ensuing ranks closed furiously with the Knights of the Cross, but neither courage, nor endurance, nor any human power could save them from disaster and destruction. And how could it have been otherwise, when on one side fought knights completely encased in steel and mounted on chargers protected with armour, and on the other side men, strong and sturdy indeed, but covered only with skins, and mounted on small horses? It was in vain, therefore, that the stubborn Lithuanians sought to find a way to the skins of their German foes. Their spears, their sabres, their clubs set with flints or nails, merely rebounded from the iron plates as from a rock or castle wall. Witold's unhappy legions were crushed down beneath the mass of men and horses; they were hacked with swords and axes, they were pierced and broken with halberds, they were trampled down beneath the hoofs of horses. It was in vain that Prince Witold hurled fresh bands into the jaws of death; in vain was their resolution, futile their ferocity, unavailing their recklessness, fruitless the outpouring of their blood!

The Tartars, Bessarabians, and Wallachians were the first to flee, but soon the whole Lithuanian wall burst asunder, and wild panic seized all hearts.

Most of the Lithuanian troops fled towards the Lake of Lubicz, closely pursued by the principal forces of the Germans, who wrought such terrible havoc among them that the whole shore was soon covered with dead.

Another and smaller portion of Witold's troops, however, which included the three Smolensk regiments, had retreated towards the Polish wing, hotly pressed by six of the German detachments, and later by those who had returned from the pursuit of the other fugitives. But the men of Smolensk, being better armed, made a more effective stand against their enemies. Every step, almost every inch of ground, was purchased with streams of blood. One of the Smolensk bands was cut down almost to a man, but the two others defended themselves with the fury of despair. Yet nothing could stay the irresistible course of the

Germans. Some of their detachments were completely mastered by the frenzy of battle. Single knights, spurring and rearing their steeds, forced their way headlong, with axe or sword upraised, into the thickest ranks of the enemy. Their swords and halberds were wielded with almost superhuman strength, and at length the whole body, hurling back, trampling down and crushing under foot the horsemen of Smolensk, reached the flank of the Polish front and centre, which, for more than an hour, had been contending against the Germans, led by Kuno von Lichtenstein.

At this point Kuno found a task that was less easy, for here there was greater equality of arms and horses, as well as of military training. Here the Polish spears even forced the Germans back, for the first attack was made by three of the most redoubtable Polish bands—that of Krakow, the light horse under the command of Jendrek of Brochocice, and the household horse led by Powala of Taczew. But it was when spears were shivered, and men grasped their swords and axes, that the fight grew fiercest. Shield clattered against shield, and man grappled with man; horses stumbled headlong, and banners were hurled to the ground; helms, armlets, and cuirasses were cleft asunder beneath the blows of swords and axes, suits of armour ran with blood, and knights fell from their saddles like pine trees hewn down in the forest.

Those Knights of the Cross who had fought against the Poles at Wilno knew what a stubborn and inflexible people they were, but the novices and strangers were filled with an astonishment akin to awe as soon as they beheld them. Many of them involuntarily reined in their steeds, gazing before them in perplexity; but before they had made up their minds what they should do they had met their death from a Polish hand. For as hail descends mercilessly from copper clouds upon the cornfields, so densely and piteously did the blows shower down; swords clashed, axes flashed—falling ruthlessly and unceasingly; suits of armour resounded as when iron is hammered at a forge; men's lives were extinguished as tapers are blown out by the wind; groans burst forth from human breasts, dying eyes grew dim, and youthful faces paled as they sank into eternal light.

Sparks flew upward as steel struck against steel; frag-

ments of shattered spear-staffs, shreds of banners, and ostrich and peacock plumes dashed through the air. Chargers slipped on the bloody cuirasses that lay on the ground, and on the bodies of fallen horses. He who fell wounded was crushed beneath their hoofs.

Of the chief Polish knights none had as yet fallen. Like a fire sweeping over a parched meadow, devouring grass and bushes in its course, they advanced in close order, loudly shouting the names of their patrons or the war-cries of their families. Lis of Targowisko grappled with Gamrat, the gallant Komthur of Osterode, who, losing his shield, wound his white mantle about his upper arm to protect himself from the blows of his foe. But Lis cut through both mantle and armlet with his sword, severing the arm from the shoulder; with a second stroke he pierced Gamrat's body so that the sword-point grated against his backbone. The men of Osterode uttered a cry of dismay on seeing their commander fall; but Lis rushed in among them like an eagle among a flock of cranes, and when Staszko of Charbimowice and Domarat of Kobylany had flown to his aid, the three began husking the Knights of the Cross as bears husk the fruit of the field sown with pease.

Here Paszko Zlodziej of Biskupice slew Kunz Adelsbach, a celebrated brother of the Order. When Kunz saw the giant before him wielding his axe covered with blood and clotted hair, his heart was seized with fear, and he cried out that he was ready to yield himself captive. But amid the uproar Paszko was unable to hear, and rising in his stirrups he cleft the German's head and his steel helm in two, as one might split an apple. Soon afterwards he slew Loch of Mecklenburg and Klingenstein, Helmsdorf, who belonged to a powerful line of Swabian counts, Limpach of Mayence, and Nachterwitz of the same place, until at length the terrified Germans began to retreat before him in all directions. They were like a crumbling wall before his blows; every moment he was seen to rise in his stirrups to deliver a fresh stroke, then his axe glittered in the air, and yet another German helm was laid low among the horses' feet.

So, too, the mighty Jendrek of Brochocice, having broken his sword on the head of a knight who bore an owl on his shield and wore also a helm in the form of an owl's head, seized his antagonist's arm and broke it; then, snatching

the knight's sword, he killed him instantly with his own weapon. He also took captive a young knight named Dienheim, whom he saw to be without a helm and spared, for he was as yet almost a boy, and turned upon his conqueror the ingenuous look of childhood. Jendrek therefore thrust him into the keeping of his attendants, little suspecting then that he had taken a son-in-law; for, as it happened, Dienheim afterwards married his captor's daughter, and remained for the rest of his life in Poland.

The Germans now rushed on furiously, desiring to rescue young Dienheim, who came of a great family of Rhenish counts. But the knights "before the banner," Sumik of Madbroze, the two brothers Plomykow, Dobko Okwia and Zych Pikna speedily forced them back, as a lion turns back a bull, pressing them towards the legion of Saint George, and spreading disorder and ruin among them.

The royal household detachment, led by Ciolek of Zelichowo, engaged the guests of the Order. With his giant strength Powala of Taczew threw down men and horses, smashed steel helms as if they had been egg shells, and attacked single-handed whole bands of the foe. By his side fought Leszko of Goraj, another Powala of Wyhucz, Mscislaw of Skrzynew, and two Bohemians, Sokol and Zbislawek. Here the struggle was long, for the Polish band had to withstand three German regiments; but when the twenty-second detachment, under Jasko of Tarnow, came to their assistance, the opposing forces were equalised, and the Germans were driven back nearly half a bowshot beyond the spot where the conflict had begun.

But they were thrown back still further by the great Krakow division, led by Zyndram himself, in the van of which, before the banner, rode the most formidable of all the Poles, Zawisza the Black. By his side fought his brother Farurej, Floryan Pelitczyk of Korytnica, Skarbek of Gory, the renowned Lis of Targowisko, Paszko Zlodziej, Jan Nalecz, and Stach of Charbimowice. Beneath the terrible hand of Zawisza many valiant men went down, as if within the black armour of the Polish knight they had encountered the form of Death himself. He fought with knitted brow and contracted nostrils, calm and self-possessed, as if performing some ordinary task; at times he turned his shield aside to ward off a blow, but every flash of his own sword was followed by the death-shriek of some stricken man. Not once did he look about him, but held on his

way relentlessly, like some black cloud that every moment hurls forth its thunderbolts.

The detachment from Posen, whose ensign bore a crownless eagle, was engaged in a death struggle, and the Archbishop's regiment and the three Mazovian bands vied with it in gallantry and hardihood, while the other troops were not lacking in emulation. In the Sieradz detachment young Zbyszko of Bogdaniec dashed like a wild boar into the thickest of the enemy's ranks, while at his side fought old Macko, fiercely yet deliberately, like a wolf that bites only to kill.

Macko sought everywhere for Kuno von Lichtenstein, but as he was unable to discern him in the throng, he was fain for the moment to choose out other knights, especially such as wore the most magnificent armour, and unhappy were those who came in his way. Not far from the two knights of Bogdaniec fought the exceedingly ill-favoured Cztań of Rogow. In the first encounter he had his helm broken, and now he fought bareheaded, terrifying the Germans with his bloody, shaggy face, which to them seemed that of some forest monster rather than that of a man.

Hundreds, and soon thousands, of knights lay dead on both sides ere the German avalanche began to totter beneath the blows of the infuriated Poles; then, however, something suddenly happened that for a moment threatened to turn the fortune of the whole fight.

The German detachments, returning from the pursuit of the flying Lithuanians, flushed and intoxicated with victory, approached the flank of the Polish wing. Imagining that all the King's troops had already been beaten, and that the battle was fought and won, they were returning in great disorderly bands, shouting and singing as they went, when suddenly they saw the fearful slaughter that was taking place before them, and the Poles, already nearly victorious, encircling the German ranks. The Knights of the Cross bent forward their heads and gazed with astonishment through the bars of their visors at the sight; then, in a moment, every man dashed the spurs into his horse's flanks, and rushed into the thick of the battle.

One band followed close upon the other to the attack, until thousands had fallen upon the Polish ranks now weary with the fighting. The Germans shouted with joy at the sight of the approaching succour, and began to attack the

Poles with fresh ardour. Along the whole line the battle raged hotly ; the field was drenched with streams of blood ; the sky grew still more overcast, and the hollow sound of thunder broke across the sky, as if God himself would intervene between the combatants.

The victory had begun to incline towards the Germans. Confusion was already spreading in the Polish ranks. The Germans, frenzied at the thought of victory, raised with one voice the hymn of triumph :

“Christ is arisen! . . .”

At this moment something even more extraordinary took place.

As he lay on the ground one of the Knights of the Cross ripped up with a knife the belly of the horse ridden by Marcin of Wrocimowice, who carried the great banner of Krakow with its crowned eagle, sacred to all the royal troops. Instantly steed and driver went down, and with them the banner tottered and fell.

Immediately hundreds of iron arms were stretched out towards it, and from every German breast burst forth a cry of joy. They believed that the end had come ; they imagined that the Poles must now be seized with panic and terror, that for them the hour of disaster, disgrace, and overthrow had come, and that their German swords had but to pursue and cut them down as they fled.

But at this moment a bloody deception awaited them.

It is true that the Polish troops shouted as one man with desperation at the sight of the falling banner, but in the cry and in the desperation there was fury rather than fear. It was as if living fire had fallen upon their cuirasses. Like raging lions, the most formidable knights of both armies rushed towards the spot, and a tempest rather than a battle was let loose around the banner. Men and horses were packed together in an immense whirlpool, and in it weapons surged to and fro ; swords clinked, axes clashed, steel shrieked against iron. The uproar, the groans and piercing cries of dying men, were mingled into one appalling cry as if the damned had been let loose from the depths of hell. A great cloud of dust arose, and from out of it dashed riderless horses, maddened with terror, their eyes bloodshot and their manes flying wildly in the wind.

But this did not last long. Not a German issued from

the tempest alive, and soon the rescued banner was once more raised over the ranks of Poland. The wind stirred its folds, spreading them out, causing the standard to float forth nobly like the blossoming of some great flower—like an omen of hope, a sign of God's wrath against the Germans, a promise of victory for the knights of Poland.

The whole army greeted the banner with a shout of exultation, and forthwith set upon the Germans with such ardour that it seemed as if in the interval each detachment had doubled the strength and number of its warriors.

The Knights of the Cross, assailed mercilessly, relentlessly, lacking even breathing space, thrust back and pressed from every side, hacked unsparingly with axes, swords, and halberds, began to totter and retreat. Here and there voices called for mercy. Now and again some foreign knight, his face white with terror and amazement, rushed headlong from the turmoil blindly, content to be borne wherever his no less terrified steed might take him. The greater part of the white mantles, worn over their armour by the brothers of the Order, already lay prostrate on the ground.

Dismay entered the hearts of the Teutonic chiefs, for they saw that their whole salvation now depended on the Grand Master, who had hitherto stood in readiness at the head of sixteen regiments held by him in reserve.

And he, looking upon the battle from a height, understood that the moment for action had come, and set his iron legions in motion as the wind moves a heavy, ominous cloud charged with hail.

A little while before, Zyndram of Maszkow had appeared in front of the third Polish division, which so far had not taken part in the battle. Mounted on a wild stallion, he watched closely over everything, attentively following every turn of the contest.

Among the Polish foot soldiers stood some files of Bohemian mercenaries. One of these had wavered even before encountering the enemy, but, regaining their courage in good time, the men remained at their post, and, having rejected their commander, were now burning with the thirst of battle, anxious to redeem their momentary weakness with their blood. The chief forces, however, consisted of Polish regiments made up of mounted but unarmoured landowners, of infantry from the towns, and—the most

numerous—of peasants armed with pikes, heavy boar spears, and scythes set upright on poles.

"Make ready! Make ready!" shouted the far-reaching voice of Zyndram, as he flew like lightning along the lines.

"Ready! Ready!" repeated the lesser chiefs.

The peasants now knew that their time was coming; they rested the poles of their spears, their flails, and their scythes on the ground, and, after having crossed themselves devoutly, began to spit on their huge, toil-stained hands.

The ominous sound of spitting passed along the whole line; then every man grasped his weapon and drew his breath. At this moment a messenger rode up to Zyndram with an order from the King, and in a panting voice whispered something in his ear. Zyndram, turning at once to the foot soldiers, brandished his sword and shouted:

"Forward!"

"Forward! In line! Keep the pace!" shouted the chiefs.

"On! On! Down with the hounds! At them!"

They started. In order to keep pace and not break the line, all began to repeat together:

"Hail—Ma-ry—full—of—grace;—the—Lord—is—with—thee!"

And they advanced like a flood—the mercenary bands, the soldiers from the towns, peasants from Little and Great Poland, Silesians who before the war had taken refuge in the kingdom, and Mazovians from the neighbourhood of Lyck who had fled from the rule of the Knights of the Cross.

The whole field shone and glittered with their spear-heads and scythes.

At length they reached the enemy.

"Strike!" shouted the chiefs.

"Ugh!"

And every man gave a grunt like a strong woodcutter when he raises his axe for the first blow, and entered upon the fray with all his strength and with all the breath in his breast.

The tumult and the shouting rent the sky.

The King, who had followed the battle from a height, constantly sent out messengers in every direction. He had even grown hoarse with giving orders. At length, seeing that all the troops were engaged, he grew eager to take part in the conflict in person.

The courtiers, fearing that some harm might come to His Majesty, would not permit him to do so. Zolawa grasped his bridle, and although the King struck his hand with his spear he would not release it. Others also barred his way, entreating and beseeching him not to stir, and representing that he could not hope to influence the event of the battle in any manner.

But presently both the King and his retinue were overshadowed by a great danger.

Following the example of those who had returned after the rout of the Lithuanians, and desiring also to attack the Polish flank, the Grand Master executed a curved movement, so that his sixteen regiments were obliged to pass close to the hill on which King Jagiello stood.

The Poles at once perceived the danger, but it was now too late to retreat. The royal banner was furled, and the King's secretary, Zbigniew of Olesnica, galloped at full speed to the nearest detachment which at the moment was preparing to meet the enemy, and which was led by the knight, Mikolaj of Kielbasa.

"The King is in peril!" cried Zbigniew. "To the rescue!"

But Kielbasa, who had lost his helm, tore from his head a cloth cap, wet with sweat and stained with blood, and, showing it to the messenger, shouted in a fury:

"See whether we are idle here! Fool! Do you not see that that host is sweeping down on us, and that if we do not stay it we but enable it to reach the King? Be off, or I will pierce you with this sword!"

And forgetful to whom he was speaking, panting for breath and carried away with the violence of his anger, he actually raised his hand to strike the secretary. But Zbigniew, seeing with whom he had to deal, and seeing, moreover, that the old knight was in the right, galloped back to the King and reported to him what had taken place.

Immediately the royal bodyguard stepped forth like a wall, to protect their sovereign with their breasts. But now Jagiello would allow no one to restrain him, and took his place in the foremost rank. They had hardly taken up their position when the German detachments had already approached so near that the devices on their shields could be plainly distinguished. The sight of them might well have caused the stoutest heart to quiver, for they were the very pick and flower of chivalry. Arrayed in magnifi-

cent armour, mounted on their huge, bison-like chargers, unwearied by the battle, in which they had not yet taken part, they swept on like a hurricane, amid the clatter of hoofs, the tumult of many voices, and the rustle of banners and pennons, while at their head flew the Grand Master himself in his broad, white mantle, which, spread out by the wind, looked like the majestic wings of an eagle.

The Grand Master had already passed the royal suite, and was riding swiftly towards the centre of the battle. He did not know that the King was there, and did not recognise him as he passed; the small handful of knights standing apart did not appear to him of any importance. From one of the bands, however, a gigantic German broke forth, and whether it was that he recognised Jagiello, or that he was allured by the King's silvery armour, or that he wished to display his courage, he bent his head, levelled his spear, and rushed straight upon Jagiello.

The King also spurred his horse, and ere his attendants could restrain him he had rushed against the German. They would assuredly have closed in mortal combat had it not been for the same Zbigniew of Olesnica, the King's secretary, who was equally skilled in knightly craft as in the Latin tongue. Zbigniew, who held in his hand a broken lance, attacked the German on the flank, and striking his head with the fragment, broke his helm and threw him to the earth. "At the same moment the King himself did strike him on the bare forehead with the sharp point of a spear, thus deigning to kill him with his own hand."

Thus perished the renowned German knight, Diepold Kikieritz von Dieber. Duke Jamont seized his horse, while Diepold, mortally stricken, lay in his golden girdle, the white mantle over his steel cuirass. His eyes turned glassy, but with his feet he beat the earth for a time; then Death, the great pacifier of men, enveloped his sight in night, bringing him eternal rest.

The knights of the Chelm detachment hastened to avenge their comrade's death, but the Grand Master himself barring their way, shouted: "Back! turn back!" and urged them on to the thick of the strife, where the fortune of the day was to be decided.

Again a strange thing happened. Mikolaj of Kielbasa, who stood nearest the field, had indeed recognised the enemy, but the other Polish bands could not distinguish

them clearly through the dust clouds, and thinking that they were the Lithuanians returning to the battle, they did not hasten to meet them.

Dobko of Olesnica was the first to rush upon the Grand Master, as he rode on at the head of his troops. He recognised him by his mantle, by his shield, and by the great golden reliquary which he wore over the cuirass on his breast. Although the Polish knight far surpassed the Grand Master in strength, he dared not strike with his lance at the reliquary. Ulrich, therefore, merely warded the lance upwards and slightly wounded the Pole's horse, whereupon they rode past each other in a circle, and returned each to his own people.

"The Germans! The Grand Master himself!" shouted Dobko.

On hearing these words the Polish detachments rode swiftly upon the enemy. Mikolaj of Kielbasa and his men were the first to attack them, and immediately the battle raged anew.

But whether it was that the knights of the province of Chelm, many of whom were of Polish descent, did not strike with sincerity, or that the fury of the Poles was now incontrollable, the fresh German assault was not so effective as the Grand Master had expected. He had imagined that it would prove the last blow to the power of Jagiello, but instead of this he soon perceived that it was the Poles who were harassing and driving back his legions, hacking and hammering them as if they held them in a vice, and that his knights were defending themselves rather than making way against their assailants.

It was in vain that he encouraged them with his voice; it was in vain that he drove them into the fray with his sword. It is true that they defended themselves, and that vigorously; but they had neither the enthusiasm nor the dash which takes possession of victorious troops, and by which the hearts of the Poles were consumed. Blood-stained, covered with wounds, and breathless, in battered armour and with well notched swords, the Poles swept furiously against the thickest ranks of the Germans. Some of these took to reining in their horses, and to look round apprehensively, as if to see whether the arms of the great iron vice that pressed them so remorselessly had yet completely closed; slowly but unceasingly they shrank backwards, as if anxious to escape unobserved from its murderous grasp.

But now, from the border of the forest, came fresh sounds of shouting. It came from the peasants, whom Zyndram had just led forward and let loose upon the foe. Scythes were soon hacking at iron armour, and flails lashing at cuirasses; men fell dead with even greater frequency, and the trodden ground was drenched with blood; the battle raged like an enormous flame, for the Germans, recognising that their only safety now lay in the strength of their swords, began to defend themselves with increasing desperation.

Thus they contended together, each side uncertain of victory, until great clouds of dust were suddenly seen rising on the right flank of the royal army.

"The Lithuanians are returning!" shouted the Poles joyfully.

And they guessed aright. The Lithuanians, whom it was easier to disperse than to vanquish, had come back, and, making an unearthly din, they were now rushing like a hurricane to the fight, borne by their swift-footed horses.

At this moment several of the komthurs, with Werner von Tetlingen at their head, galloped up to the Grand Master.

"Save yourself, lord!" cried the Komthur of Elbing, with pallid lips. "Save yourself and the Order, ere the circle closes in upon us!"

But the chivalrous Ulrich looked at him darkly and, raising his hand towards heaven, cried:

"God forbid that I should leave the field on which so many gallant men have fallen! God forbid it!"

And shouting to his men to follow, he dashed into the thick of the battle.

Meanwhile the Lithuanians came wildly on, and there ensued such a scene of whirling, seething confusion, that amid it the eye could with difficulty perceive anything.

The Grand Master, stricken in the mouth by the sharp point of a Lithuanian spear, and twice wounded in the face, continued with his ever-failing right hand to ward off the blows; but at length, pierced through the neck with a lance, he fell to the earth like an oak.

A swarm of skin-clad warriors completely surrounded him.

Werner von Tetlingen fled from the field with several

regiments, but around those that remained the troops of the King closed like an iron band. The battle changed into a slaughter, and so terrible were the losses of the Knights of the Cross that the like of it has seldom been seen in human history. And never in Christian times, since the battles of the Romans with the Goths and with Attila, or those of Charles Martel with the Arabs, had so mighty armies fought against each other. And now, like a reaped cornfield, one of the hosts lay low. The bands which the Grand Master had last led into the fight were soon constrained to yield. The men of Chelm lowered their banners and planted them in the ground. Other knights leaped from their horses and knelt on the bloody ground to signify their willingness to be made captive. The whole detachment of Saint George, in which the foreign guests of the Order served, did likewise, along with its commander.

But still the fight went on, for many of the German detachments preferred death to mercy or captivity. They now gathered, as was their custom, into a huge ring, and defended themselves like a herd of boars surrounded by a pack of wolves. The mass of Poles and Lithuanians encircled them as a great serpent encircles the body of a bull, tightening its embrace at every moment. And again there was the flash of arms, and the thunder of the flails; scythes clattered and swords slashed, spears pierced and axes clanged. They hewed the Germans down like a forest; silent, gloomy, great, undaunted, the vanquished met their death.

Some raised their visors to bid each other a last farewell, or kiss some comrade before they fell; some rushed blindly like madmen into the whirlpool; some fought as in a dream; some slew themselves, driving their daggers into their own throats; while others, throwing off their cuirasses, implored their comrades to strike them down.

The great ring was soon scattered by the vehemence of the Poles into a score of smaller bands, and single knights had once more an opportunity to escape. But for the most part these bands continued to fight fiercely and desperately.

Those who knelt to ask for mercy were few, and even when these smaller bands had been scattered by the terrible onrush of the Poles, many knights fighting single-handed would not consent to fall alive into the hands of

the victors. For the Teutonic Order and for Western chivalry the day was one of great disaster, but one also of the greatest glory. At the feet of the gigantic Arnold von Baden, encompassed by peasant foot soldiers, there rose up a veritable rampart of Polish dead, while he, mighty and invincible, towered over it like a landmark on a height, and all who came within sword's length of him fell dead as if stricken by lightning.

At length Zawisza the Black rode towards him. Seeing the knight without a horse, and having no intention to attack him from behind, he dismounted and called to him from a little distance :

"Turn your face to me, German, and either fight me or surrender !"

Arnold turned round and recognised Zawisza by his black armour, and by the arms of the Sulima on his shield.

"Death is at hand and my hour has come," he said to himself, "from that man none can hope to escape ! Yet could I but vanquish him I should win immortal fame, and perhaps leave this field alive."

With these thoughts he rushed towards him, and they closed like contending tempests on the ground strewn with dead. But Zawisza surpassed all other men in strength so much that unhappy were the parents whose sons happened to meet him in battle. And, indeed, beneath the weight of Zawisza's sword, the shield of Arnold was broken and his steel helm shattered like an earthen pot, so that the gallant German fell with his skull cleft in two.

Heinrich, the Komthur of Czluchow, the same inveterate foe of the Polish race who had sworn to have two swords carried before him until both should be imbrued in Polish blood, was slipping stealthily from the field like a fox from a wood surrounded by hunters, when Zbyszko of Bogdaniec crossed his path. The komthur, seeing the sword-blade raised over his head, cried out : "Mercy ! Have mercy on me !" and wrung his hands in terror. The young knight heard, and although he was no longer able to divert the blow, he succeeded in turning his sword so that only the flat struck the face of the fat, perspiring komthur. Zbyszko thereupon threw him towards his groom, who put a halter

about his neck, and led him like an ox to the spot whither all the German prisoners had been taken.

Old Macko was still searching over the bloody field for Kuno von Lichtenstein, and fortune, favourable to the Poles in everything throughout the day, at length delivered him into his hands in the thicket, where a handful of Knights of the Cross who had escaped from the terrible disaster were concealed. The sunlight glittering on their armour betrayed their presence to the pursuers. All fell on their knees and yielded instantly. But Macko, learning that the Grand Komthur of the Order was among the prisoners, ordered him to appear before him.

"Kuno von Lichtenstein," said he, taking off his own helm, "do you know me?"

Lichtenstein knit his brows and, fixing his eyes on Macko's face, said presently:

"I saw you at the court of Plock."

"No," answered Macko, "you had seen me before that! You saw me in Krakow, when I besought you for the life of my nephew, who, for a rash attack upon you, was condemned to death. I then vowed to God and swore by my knightly honour that I would one day seek you out and meet you in mortal combat."

"I know," said Lichtenstein, pursing out his lips haughtily, though at the same time he grew very pale. "But now I am your captive, and you would be dishonoured were you to raise sword against me."

Macko's face contracted ominously, and his look resembled that of a wolf as he answered:

"Kuno von Lichtenstein, I will not raise sword against a weaponless man; but I tell you that if you refuse me battle now, I will have you hanged on a halter like a dog."

"Then I have no choice!" exclaimed the Grand Komthur. "Come on!"

"To the death, not to captivity!" stipulated Macko.

"To the death!"

And presently they fought in the presence of the other German and Polish knights. Kuno was younger and more dexterous, but Macko far surpassed his adversary in strength of hand and limb, so that in a twinkling he brought him to the ground and pressed his knee against his breast.

The Grand Komthur's eyes turned in his head with terror.

"Spare!" he groaned, spitting saliva and sand from his foaming lips.

"No!" answered Macko remorselessly.

And placing his misericordia at his enemy's throat he gave two thrusts. The horrible sound of the death-rattle came from Kuno's throat, and a wave of blood gushed from his mouth; violent spasms shook his body, and he lay still beneath the dread touch of Him who conquers even the mightiest knights.

The battle now became a hunt and a slaughter. He who would not surrender perished. In those times there had been many battles and encounters throughout the world, but never in living memory a defeat so terrible. For at the feet of the great King had fallen not only the Teutonic Order, but the whole of Germany, who, with the flower of her chivalry, had supported that advance guard of the Order which was eating ever deeper and deeper into the Slavonic body.

Out of some seven hundred "white mantles" who led the German hosts, only fifteen remained, and more than forty thousand bodies lay in eternal sleep upon the field.

The banners, which even at noon were floating over the enormous forces of the Order, had fallen into the blood-stained and victorious hands of the Poles. Not one was saved, and now the Polish and Lithuanian knights cast the trophies at the feet of King Jagiello who, raising his eyes piously towards heaven, repeated in a trembling voice:

"Thou, O God, hast willed it!"

The chief captives were also led before the King. Abdank Sharbek of Gory brought Kasimir, Duke of Stettin; the Bohemian knight Trocnowski, Konrad, Duke of Olesnica; and Przedpelko Kopidowski, whose coat of arms was Drujja, led forth George Gersdorf, swooning with wounds, who under the banner of Saint George had led the foreign knights serving with the Order.

The knights of two and twenty nations took part in the struggle of the Order against the Poles, and now the King's secretaries were writing down the names of the prisoners who, kneeling at the feet of Jagiello, besought his mercy and prayed that they might be sent back to their homes in return for ransom.

The army of the Teutonic Order had ceased to exist. During the pursuit the Poles took also its great camp, and with it—besides the remnant of the routed army—innumerable waggons loaded with fetters destined for the Poles, and much wine, intended to be consumed at a great feast after the victory.

The sun was about to set. A brief shower of rain descended and laid the dust. The King, Prince Witold, and Zyndram of Maszkow were about to visit the battlefield when the bodies of the German chiefs were brought before them. The Lithuanians carried that of the Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen, pierced with spears and covered with dust and blood, and laid it before the King. Jagiello sighed compassionately, and, looking upon the huge body as it lay face upward on the ground, exclaimed :

“Behold him who this morning thought himself mightier than all other rulers of the world !”

Great tears dropped like pearls down his cheeks, and after pausing for a few moments, he continued :

“Yet he has fallen in a gallant fight ; let us therefore celebrate his courage, and honour him with worthy Christian burial.”

And he at once gave orders that the body should be washed carefully in the lake, arrayed in magnificent robes, and—until the coffin should be prepared—covered with the mantle of the Order.

Meanwhile more and more bodies were brought in, and as they came they were identified by the prisoners. Among them were Kuno von Lichtenstein, whose throat showed the terrible marks of the misericordia ; Friedrich Wallenrod, the Marshal of the Order ; Count Albrecht Schwartzberg, the Grand Wardrobe-keeper ; Thomas Mercheim, the Grand Treasurer ; Count von Wende, who had fallen by the hand of Powala of Taczew ; and more than six hundred bodies of famous komthurs and brothers. The grooms placed them side by side, and they lay on the earth like felled trees, their faces, white as their mantles, turned heavenwards with staring, glassy eyes, wherein pride and anger, terror and the frenzy of battle, were ineffaceably fixed.

Above their heads were planted the captured banners—all that the forces of the Knights of the Cross had carried. The evening breeze played among their coloured folds, displaying the devices from time to time as it gently rose

and fell, and rustling sweetly as if lulling the fallen knights to sleep. In the distance, beneath the last rays of the setting sun, bands of Lithuanians could be seen bringing in the captured cannon, which for the first time the Knights of the Cross had employed in a pitched battle, without, however, inflicting any damage on the victors.

On the hill, by the side of the King, the chief of the Polish knights assembled, and breathing heavily with weariness they looked down upon the banners and the bodies lying at their feet, as tired reapers look upon the bound sheaves of corn. The day's work had been heavy, and terrible were the fruits of the harvest, but none the less a long, gladsome, God-sent evening had come.

Therefore boundless satisfaction brightened the faces of the victors, for all knew that it was an evening that closed the miseries and hardships not of that day only, but of whole centuries.

Although he knew that his victory was great, the King nevertheless looked before him as if lost in astonishment, and at length he asked .

“Does the whole Order lie there?”

Hereupon the vice-chancellor Mikolaj, who knew the prophecies of Saint Bridget, answered :

“The day has come when their teeth have been broken, and their right arm cut off!”

And as he spoke he raised his hand and made the sign of the cross, not only over those who lay nearest, but over the whole field from Grünwald to Tannenberg. Through the air, cleared by the rain and now bright with the red glow of sunset, the immense battlefield could be distinctly seen, reeking and bloody, bristling with broken swords, spears, and scythes, covered with piles of dead men and horses from which protruded hands, feet, and hoofs; and the dismal field with its tens of thousands of dead, stretched away further than the eye could reach.

The camp followers scattered themselves over the immense graveyard, gathering weapons and despoiling the fallen of their armour.

Overhead, across the blood-red sky, flocks of crows, ravens, and eagles already swept and whirled, screaming and croaking with joy at the sight of food.

And not only was the perfidious Teutonic Order laid prostrate at the feet of the King, but the whole might of

the Germans, which until then had overflowed the unhappy Slavonian land like a flood, was shattered against the breast of Poland on that day of redemption.

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So unto thee, great jubilee of the past, and to thee, spilt blood of sacrifice, be praise and glory through all the ages !

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

MACKO and Zbyszko returned to Bogdaniec.

The old knight lived for many years afterwards ; and to Zbyszko, who continued in health and strength, it was given to see that great day on which the Grand Master of the Knights of the Cross rode forth through one of the gates of Marienburg with tears in his eyes, while through another, a Polish palatine entered at the head of Polish troops, to take possession, in the name of the King and realm, of the city and the whole land as far as the grey waters of the Baltic.

THE END.

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